Film Quarterly

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UNCLE BOONMEE WHO CAN RECALL HIS PAST LIVES

FATIH AKIN

MYSTERIES OF LISBON

ALEXANDER DOVZHENKO

DOGTOOTH

BERLIN

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EGYPTIAN STORIES

***Cairo 678* (Mohamed Diab)**
***Microphone* (Ahmad Abdalla)**

The 40th annual New Directors/New Films festival at the Museum of Modern Art and Film Society at Lincoln Center (March 23–April 3) brought together a pair of features from Egypt, telling tales of two cities and two sexes on the edge of a volcano. Both were produced in 2010, before the recent uprising.

Cairo 678, said to be "inspired by real stories," comes from New York-trained writer–director Mohamed Diab. Casting attractive actors (often with a background in TV), Diab has crafted an audience-friendly fiction film on the distressing topic of sexual harassment. The script comes in the now familiar form of an *Amores perros*-style multi-strand narrative: three characters, and their stories, will intersect in the notoriously chaotic Cairo traffic, where, according to the film itself, a red light stands for "go faster."

In the credit sequence female hands deftly weave copper wire into jewelry: a delicate piece depicting a dancing couple. We cut to an exterior of the bus whose number gives the film its title. Fayza, a woman of modest means and dress, is first shown caught in a taxi driver's mirror, then picking her way through the perilous traffic. In the film's pivotal scene, repeated from different perspectives, she will be thrown off the bus after pricking a male harasser with a pin she takes from her headscarf. We flash back one year to our second protagonist. Wealthy Seba is a jewelry designer, married to a doctor, who feels secure enough to jog in the street. Taken to a soccer match by her husband (who urges her to "show Egyptian strength" by chanting), she later celebrates the local victory outside the stadium. The great squares and boulevards throbbing with football fans are of course now familiar to foreigners too: soon they would be convulsed by political activists. In a typically pointed detail, Seba will be abducted and abused by male aggressors even while her face is painted fan-style in national colors. Rejected by her husband and advised by mother to keep quiet, she miscarries a baby.

Our third protagonist is Nelly. Unsafe even in the call center where she works, she is constantly hit on by clients on the phone. Assaulted by a van driver on the street, she fights back, becoming the first woman in her country's history to file a sexual harassment suit. Here once more there is a quiet commentary on politics and nationalism. As Nelly is interrogated in the police station, Hosni Mubarak, in an official photo, looks stolidly on. And when she goes public, hostile commentators claim she is bent on "destroying Egypt's reputation," even "overthrowing the government."

Cairo 678's three heroines meet up only one hour into the film's running time, when they are driven to desperate measures. And if the multi-strand narrative is reminiscent of González Iñárritu (or, indeed, the Oscar-winning *Traffic*), then so is the reliance on coincidence and on some ill-judged moments of melodrama. But Diab is never Manichean. Feisty Nelly, for example, is allowed a sympathetic fiancé. And even the policeman investigating a wave of stabbings of men on Cairo buses proves surprisingly benevolent, sympathetic with the women's struggle. Still the film permits itself some telling political asides. The policeman asks for an informer to be put on every bus. When his sidekick queries: "Do you know how many buses there are?" he replies: "Do you know how many informers we have?"

But even in this surveillance state, Diab allows viewers a conclusion of qualified optimism: one woman may have split from her hostile husband, but another is steadily supported by her fiancé. And when the real-life Nelly bravely took her abuser to court, she achieved a genuine change in the Egyptian legal system. Still, perhaps most surprising is *Cairo 678*'s unwitting evidence of the class chasm and religious divide in Egypt. When Seba takes the distressed Fayza home with her at one point, the wealthy secular woman's walk-in closet is bigger than many Manhattan apartments. And the skimpy black dress she loans her modest comrade is taken to be sexy lingerie by the devout woman's husband.

Expertly shot, *Cairo 678* also boasts a soundtrack of dreamy drones by Hany Edel who also appears on screen among many musicians in the festival's second Egyptian feature, Ahmad Abdalla's *Microphone*. Here the credits consist of a quick-cut montage: a recording studio, skateboarders on the street, and a kettle boiling in a kitchen. Main character Khaled (heartthrob Khaled Abol Naga) has returned from the U.S. to his native Alexandria and is having breakfast. A benign

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Cairo and Alexandria

Left: *Cairo 678*. Courtesy of Fortissimo Films. Right: *Microphone*. Courtesy of New Directors/New Films.

paternal presence, he barely intervenes in the informal narrative that follows, documenting the city's rich underground of hip-hop, graffiti, and guerrilla filmmaking. The opening images are set to an infectious rap, issuing a "welcome to Alexandria," but warning anyone who looks like a visitor from Cairo to watch out for muggers. There will be repeated references to the rivalry between the breezy maritime metropolis and the chaotic landlocked capital.

Shooting handheld throughout, Abdalla crosscuts between diverse locations: a fish market, a trendy designers' office, and the shabby streets where graffiti artists stencil designs on walls covered with political posters from recent elections, stage-managed by the regime. But beyond cinéma vérité, Abdalla has a smart and ironic focus on his chosen material, which is most likely wholly unknown to foreigners. A couple of film-school kids are shown improvising a project on Alexandria's informal art scene. They ask their teacher a question viewers might well pose to Abdalla himself: "What's the difference between fiction and documentary film?"

While *Microphone*'s plot may seem desultory (kids hang out and break up), like *Cairo 678* it carries a discreet political punch. Repeated scenes show an oleaginous arts bureaucrat, who claims to defend freedom of expression, yet refuses to support radical rappers. And while Alexandria's boys (and girls) just want to have fun, we see unforced evidence of repression by the regime. There are police checkpoints on the street, forcing rappers to rapidly hide subversive CDs. And when one graffiti tag claims that "The revolution starts here," the boast is (as we know in hindsight) by no means empty. This youth culture, however derivative it may appear, was soon to have very real effects.

What's more, *Microphone* gives a spin to *Cairo 678*'s gender critique of harassment-plagued Cairo. Here the sexes mingle freely, at least in Alexandria's arty underground circles, leading not to violence but to the teenage hookups and heartbreaks familiar around the world. Liberated professional women seem to be everywhere. But even Khaled's ex-girlfriend, chain-smoking in a café with a sea view, feels she has "nothing in common" with her fellow Egyptians and will leave the country for a Ph.D. in London. Girls in a metal band, fearing parental disapproval, won't allow their faces to be seen in the film, and sport Kiss-style greasepaint. Khaled is shown riding Alexandria's picturesque trams without incident. We wonder what women's experience of such mass transit might be like.

But the main impression of *Microphone* is sheer dynamism. We see street scenes shot on the fly, fast-motion graffiti-tagging, and ramshackle locations: from abandoned warehouses to the trash-strewn seaside and the misty delta. Similarly spontaneous and frustrated by bureaucracy, the kids decide, like Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland so long before them, to put on their show "right here" (in a sidewalk café). But unlike in 1940s Hollywood, the young musicians are frustrated by an unholy alliance of police and clerics: youthful rebellion will not be permitted, as yet, to disturb the peace. So while Alexandria's hipsters might seem at first to be equally at ease in Brooklyn or Hoxton, here context is all. *Cairo 678* concludes with real but limited change (legal reform on sexual harassment) achieved within the ancien régime. *Microphone* ends rather with its frustrated youth, deprived of a voice, looking moodily out to sea. We know what they don't: real revolution is just over the horizon.

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INTO THE PAST

***Source Code* (Duncan Jones)**
***Poetry* (Lee Chang-dong)**

Source Code should have been entitled *Lieutenant Stevens Who Can Recall His Past Lives* . . . and if the film's rewrite-history temporality is ever invented, perhaps one day it will have been.

⁂

Lee Chang-dong's glorious new film is a major step forward for an already accomplished Korean director. Whereas his previous films are dominated by harrowing psychic and linguistic breakdowns, *Poetry* involves emotional restraint and a profoundly moving emphasis on eloquence. And while trauma in the earlier films leads to isolated suffering, in *Poetry* there is solace in a strange, spectral companionship.

"I am in so much pain," says the bereaved mother in *Secret Sunshine* (2007), and she is not the only one. In *Green Fish* (1997), an apprentice gangster messily commits a murder and afterwards calls his brother from a phone booth. He tries but fails to fight back tears, his voice trembling as he reminisces feverishly about a fishing trip. Later another character finds an old photo that upsets her so much she writhes around desperately in her seat. *Peppermint Candy* (1999) begins with suicide; a close-up shows the protagonist howling in front of an oncoming train before the reverse-chronological narrative relates scenes from the etiology of his torment. An accidental killing during the man's military service is the final trauma to be dramatized—except that the film's coda shows him quietly crying for no good reason. Perhaps what burdens him is not ordinary grief but some primal angst that predates any horrifying experience.

Time and again in Lee's films the misery is such that it disrupts speech, reduces it to mere screaming, or makes any communication simply impossible. The man's wife in *Peppermint Candy* starts to sob while saying grace at a family meal and is hardly able to get the words out: "May this family . . . continue to love . . . each other." The disabled woman in *Oasis* (2002) is so unnerved in a police station by false accusations leveled at her lover that she loses any ability to protest vocally. All she can do to try to express herself is maneuver her wheelchair with all her strength into the furniture; but no one understands. Having briefly found religious consolation

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So much pain
Top: *Green Fish*. An East Film Production, 1997. DVD: Third Window Films (U.K.). Bottom: *Peppermint Candy*. Unikorea, Dream Venture Capital Corp., East Film 20, NHK, 1999. DVD: Third Window Films (U.K.).

after the death of her son, the protagonist of *Secret Sunshine* relapses into wild agony when the child's murderer himself professes a newfound Christian faith. She shrieks at the sight of an earthworm in her kitchen and later, dazed and weak from self-inflicted wounds, wails as she staggers along a dark street. (She gets help but nothing suggests that her grief will ever abate.)

Poetry opens with the body of another dead child, a schoolgirl called Agnes, drifting downstream. When her mother watches in shock as her daughter is unloaded from an ambulance, an elderly woman walks past. This is Mija—played in an absolutely transfixing performance by Yun Jung-hee—who will soon learn that her grandson, whom she is raising, was one of several boys who repeatedly raped Agnes in the months leading up to her suicide.

The fathers of the other boys gather at a restaurant to explain the situation to Mija and request she pay a share of the financial settlement which, if accepted by the mother, will allow the assaults to be kept secret. The silence with which Mija responds to this corrupt proposition is entirely different

Poetry school

Poetry. Courtesy of Kino International.

from the inarticulacy to be found in Lee's other films—instead of trying but failing to communicate, she simply refuses to. She goes outside to study a flower, penciling in a notebook while she does. It is not that she is repudiating what she has heard—she will confront her grandson more than once with what he has done and plead with him to acknowledge the crimes—it is that, as will become clear in *Poetry*'s conclusion, she feels a duty of remembrance toward Agnes that is at odds with this coverup.

Mija is taking notes for an introductory poetry class she attends. Lee depicts her artistic milieu in a gently comic fashion: at an open-mic evening, one participant makes rude jokes while another confides, "I wrote as if I were a flying butterfly"; a famous Young Turk who shows signs of being rather drunk grandly announces that "poetry deserves to die"; there is a good deal of pontificating about flowers and fruit. The self-improvement subplot thus often seems like light relief from the intricately constructed main story of the conspiracy to obtain impunity for the boys (which leads to unexpected acts of blackmail and betrayal). Yet the comedy is misleading, a brilliant manipulation that allows Lee to spring a devastating surprise in the form of the poem, "Agnes' Song," Mija eventually writes. This composition gives a sudden new significance to an earlier scene in which Mija tells fellow students about playing at the age of three or four with her older sister in a room whose drawn curtains let in only a shaft of sunlight. As she recollects childhood, Mija starts to cry but her sorrow does not, as in other Lee films, impair her speech. Mixing tenses, her language fluently binds past and present together: "Now I can see half of my sister's face. The other half is hidden in the shadows. I think she dressed me in pretty clothes. 'Mija, come here, come here,' she is saying, clapping her hands. I am tottering to her. Although I was so little, I knew my sister loved me as she told me to come to her. I felt so good."

Having treated the poetry theme playfully, at the end Lee elaborates it with a sublime tragic intensity. Mija disappears as the closing audiovisual montage, which is cinema's distinctive method of recalling the past, gets underway. The last of her is her voice—before it is supplanted in a breathtaking sound edit that needs to be heard rather than described—reading out "Agnes' Song." As it unfolds, the poem and its accompanying images evoke the schoolgirl's journey to the river bridge together with Mija's own, more recent walk along "an old path resembling my father's face." The childhood memory recounted in the classroom is transformed in the process. Mija steps into her sister's place as she reaches out to Agnes across the "black river" of time and death—"I pray . . . for you to know how deeply I loved you"—and for whatever it is worth imagines that as Agnes stood in anguish high above the water, she nevertheless felt some phantom trace of what a sick, lonely, staunch old lady remembered feeling more than sixty years before, in a room full of joy and shadows.

Rob White

TALKING CURE

***The King's Speech* (Tom Hooper)**
***The Arbor* (Clio Barnard)**

Albert Frederick Arthur George, His Royal Highness the Duke of York, later His Majesty King George VI, spends most of *The King's Speech* convinced he's been miscast. Charged with undertakings for which he's singularly unsuited yet upon whose success much depends, Bertie (as he's known to his friends) is, in Colin Firth's performance, a cross between a Hitchcockian wrong man and a stitched-up public schoolboy, two parts persecuted bewilderment to one part aggrieved entitlement. Saddled with an acute stammer and ingrained sense of inferiority, he's expected to be a public speaker and a leader of men—or at least to offer a credible performance of such roles, even though acting comes in for some stick from the film's old guard. "In the past," Bertie's father, George V (Michael Gambon) grumbles through his whiskers, "all a king had to do was look respectable in uniform and not fall off his horse. Now, we must invade people's homes and ingratiate ourselves with them. This family's been reduced to those lowest, basest of all creatures: we've become actors." In due course, however, Bertie rises to the occasion thanks to the ministrations of Lionel Logue (Geoffrey Rush), an insouciantly wise Australian speech therapist and—horrors!—amateur thesp, whose feeling for theatricality proves every bit as crucial as his therapeutic expertise in enabling Bertie to put on a good show. To seem to perform to expectation is, indeed, to perform to expectation.

The King's Speech is the tale of a sympathetic protagonist overcoming a debilitating handicap to attain personal fulfillment—and to keep up appearances, something that the film itself accomplishes adroitly. The production is all burnished period detail, from the antique chaises longues and vintage automobiles of the royal set to the artful shabbiness of Logue's consulting rooms; and the whole thing is seasoned with a spritz of salvific vulgarity (Bertie's stammer evaporates when he shifts into expletive mode) and a dollop of historical celebrity (Timothy Spall's Churchill, seemingly on loan from Madame Tussauds). Tom Hooper's stately direction runs in concert with this reassuring, therapeutic narrative, tight, wide-angle interiors giving way to more expansive exterior vistas as what's good for Bertie's soul—his movement toward the defiant cry "I have a right to be heard!"—is seen to be good too for his work, his family, and the nation. His climactic broadcast, made at the outbreak of World War II, is at once his triumph over disability, the cementing of his friendship with his doctor–teacher, a source of pride to his loved ones, a galvanizing inspiration to listeners throughout the empire and, to the extent that he has accepted and mastered the role of actor, a confirmation of the dramatic enterprise of which *The King's Speech* itself is, of course, a part. Even if a radio broadcaster isn't exposed to view in the same way as a stage or screen actor, the film is at pains to show us how closely Bertie's work resembles performance, and how important it is that his audience buys it. His hard-won eloquence cathartically reasserts the established order: the king's on his throne—and at his mic—and all's well with the world. Oscars all round!

Except, of course, all isn't well. The world will crack open, the empire crumble and many millions, in Britain and across the globe, struggle to endure challenges even more serious than a prince's anxiety that he's not being listened to. Such bitter realities inform another recent English film in which speech is much more intractably problematized than in *The King's Speech*. *The Arbor* deals with the same nexus of concerns—family, duty, speaking, and publicness—but to very different effect. The feature debut of the artist Clio Barnard, it's a dramatized documentary about the playwright Andrea Dunbar, who grew up on an impoverished council estate in Bradford, West Yorkshire, had three children by three men, became alcoholic, and died at twenty-nine.

Where *The King's Speech* is conventional and reassuring, *The Arbor* is strange and unsettling. This is a function partly of the film's setting, partly of its story, partly of its form. Brafferton Arbor on the Buttershaw Estate is at the sharp end of an imperial boomtown's postwar doldrums, its garbage-strewn scrubland and rising damp making it the sort of place seldom seen on film (Dunbar's own screenplay for 1987's *Rita, Sue and Bob Too!* being a notable exception). Barnard introduces this site of economic and social deprivation with a shot of dogs scrabbling over wasteland then, to an ambient, occasionally rocky soundtrack, alternates between handheld intimacy, stark tableaux, and flashes of exuberance (a lush close-up of overgrown grass; a young girl in a sari dancing on top of a car on a moor). Meanwhile, archive footage of

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Dunbar and her family in the 1980s supplies jolts of the real, the young writer's face aging at an unseemly rate from one clip to the next.

If these shifts make it hard to keep one's aesthetic balance, other formal gambits take us to the brink of surreality. *The Arbor* brings Dunbar's work back home, staging excerpts from her first play, whose title the film shares, at locations around the estate, if not quite invading people's homes then appearing on their doorsteps. The locals' attentive reception to these staged family rows emphasizes how indistinct the boundary between performance and reality is here. This sense is intensified by Barnard's most radical tactic: the actors lip-synch to the words of Dunbar's family and friends, as interviewed by the director. (Wim Wenders plays an interesting variation on this strange sound effect in *Pina*: we hear the reminiscences of the grieving members of Pina Bausch's dance company over shots of them looking to camera with closed mouths.) The disjunction between sound and image persists despite the fine performances of the actors on screen; insisting on the distance between experience and expression, it functions directly as an uncanny distancing device and indirectly as a slap in the face to the facile heroics of Bertie's struggle.

In *The Arbor*, the attempt to marry memory, narrative, and emotion is formally doomed. The sense of unease this approach engenders proves warranted by the story. It gradually becomes clear that *The Arbor* is a tragedy, centered not on Andrea, whose sad early death is caused by a sudden embolism unconnected to her lifestyle, but on her eldest daughter Lorraine, who would be convicted in 2007 of manslaughter following the death of her two-year-old son, born addicted to heroin, after consuming methadone. Bertie, we're told, was inspired by his father's deathbed assertion that he had "more guts than the rest of his brothers put together"; Lorraine overheard her mother saying, shortly before her death, that because Lorraine's father was a Pakistani immigrant, "she couldn't love me to the same level" as her other children. By Lorraine's own account, her anger, sadness, and resentment contributed to the life of prostitution, drug addiction, and infanticide that has left her a person apart.

The concerns with speech and family that these two films share lead to starkly different ends. *The King's Speech* sweetly fictionalizes history in order to construct an uplifting fable in which the future monarch is an Everyman. "Sometimes," Bertie muses at one point, "when I ride through the streets and see the common man staring at me, I'm struck by how little I know of his life and how little he knows of mine." The success of the film in terms of awards and box office is testament to the effectiveness of its message that such a deficit of knowledge is a trivial failure of understanding, easily rectified by better communication. Where *The King's Speech* finds healing, *The Arbor* insists on fragmentation. Unlike Bertie's respectfully inquisitive common man, the working-class women Dunbar depicts are isolated and unreconciled with the wider world. No talking cure can make things better here. The lip-synching technique makes speech impediment an essential—but unresolvable—feature of the film's form, not just a character's temporary affliction. There's trauma but no catharsis. In *The Arbor*'s echo chamber of disembodied voices, eerily suspended somewhere between documentary and drama, the misfit between speaker and performer never stops reminding us of an alienation—a miscasting at the level of social identity itself—that no doctor–teacher can remedy.

Elocution lessons

Top: *The King's Speech*. © 2010 UK Film Council/Speaking Films Productions Ltd. DVD: Momentum Pictures Home Entertainment (U.K.). Bottom: *The Arbor*. © 2010 Artangel Media Ltd/UK Film Council. DVD: Verve Pictures (U.K.).

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CINEMA'S NEW APPENDAGES

Apps—small, function-specific software programs designed to run on cell phones and handheld computers—are quickly becoming an ubiquitous media experience. A recent study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project found that 24% of all U.S. adults use apps regularly on their mobile devices. So it was only a matter of time before Hollywood studios tried to turn the app into a distribution platform. However, the recent Warner Bros. "app editions" of *The Dark Knight* and *Inception* ironically constrain access to the films they showcase, which raises questions about what kind of user engagement—and what kind of intimacy with movies—an app can enable.

Software manufacturer Ashton-Tate coined the term "app" in 1985 to describe the individual functions—such as "save" or "check spelling"—of their word-processing software, Framework II (June Brevdy, "New Version of Framework Gains Features," *InfoWorld*, December 9, 1985). Thirty-six years later, its connotations have become much more complex. Marketed as solutions for individual tasks ("There's an app for that"), apps are replacing multipurpose software packages with limited functionality but seemingly limitless variety. Thus I have one app for taking photos, another for viewing them, a third for sharing them, and a fourth for retouching and color-correction. As Ian Bogost argues, this multiplicity changes our expectations for electronic media: "apps shatter the very idea of aesthetic coherence, turning computers into weird samplers that betray the smooth, slick exteriors of the iDevices that contain them" (www.bogost.com/blog/what_is_an_app.shtml). The narrow functionality of apps also means that they possess no obvious affinity with movies' world-building complexity. Apps encourage unilateral engagement, which is not the same kind of user involvement that feature films elicit. Apps emphasize modularity and targeted use; by contrast, films—especially Hollywood films—employ techniques like continuity editing to bind the spectator within a cohesive cosmos. Whereas apps revel in componentry, in the discrete tasks behind multi-tasking, Hollywood features constantly cover up their components (individual shots, special effects, below-the-line labor) to generate as seamless an experience as possible.

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So whereas Hollywood features create worlds to tell stories and sell tie-ins, the ethos of the app is to do one thing and do it well. Take, for example, *Inception the App*—which should not be confused with the app edition of *Inception*. *Inception the App* ostensibly "transports *Inception the Movie* straight into your life" through an immersive audio experience—but only an audio experience. A reactive music platform, *Inception the App* uses an iPhone's global positioning system, clock, gyroscope, and accelerometer to merge Hans Zimmer's score and ambient noise picked up by the iPhone's microphone into distorted sonic dreamworlds for the listener. It adds surreal echoes, crashing waves, and melancholy orchestration to the user's sonic environment, turning reality into expressionism. Yet for all its beauty, that is all it does.

By contrast, the app editions of *The Dark Knight* and *Inception*, which are free to download but cost between ten and twenty dollars to open fully, each include two ways of viewing the full-length feature (streaming video or download, which takes awhile) as well as galleries of frame grabs, production stills, audio and video clips, and multiple language and subtitle tracks. The *Inception* app edition also contains a prequel comic, *The Cobol Job*, as well as an instructional manual for the Portable Automated Somnacin IntraVenous (or PASIV) Device the dream thieves use to keep their targets asleep, while *The Dark Knight* app edition offers a short trivia game.

These features are all available on—and were originally designed for—other platforms, and as a result they produce a derivative, ersatz DVD experience. As numerous commentators have shown, DVD extras cultivate connoisseur spectatorship; their commentary tracks, making-of documentaries, and other informational extras offer the viewer an illusion of privileged access to the film. Blu-ray discs enhance this fantasy of inclusion with additional bonus features, some of which can even be engaged during the movie. (Watching an *Inception* Blu-ray in "Extraction Mode," for example, allows one to cut to scenes from the film's making-of documentary as relevant stunts occur.) However, popular viewing practices seem to be moving away from such enhanced spectatorship toward the stripped-down, feature-only convenience of online platforms like iTunes, Netflix Watch Instantly, Hulu, and Video on Demand. The success of these services, taken together with the continuing decline of DVD and Blu-ray sales, suggests that expediency trumps supplements for most

A bad connection

Second: *The Dark Knight*: app edition. Others: *Inception*: app edition © 2011Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.

consumers—and indeed, expediency of another kind seems to be the main impetus behind the app editions. Apple's App Store enables Warner Bros. to sell *Inception* and *The Dark Knight* in twenty-three countries that the iTunes Store does not service, including China and Russia. And because iTunes does not offer subtitles or multiple language tracks for most U.S. films, these app editions' sixteen language and thirty-four subtitle options increase the studio's potential audience within existing iTunes Store territories too.

It should come as no surprise that Warner Bros. is looking for new ways to sell its cinematic commodities to viewers who care most about convenience and cost, but the studio's marketing emphasizes a third app appeal—a purportedly unique "connected viewing experience," to quote the App Store description. However, the more one experiences these app editions, the clearer it becomes that their connections produce only a very impoverished kind of interactivity. While the app editions do enable users to follow live fan and Warner Bros. Twitter feeds (albeit not while actually watching the movies) and post preselected dialogue quotations to their own Facebook and Twitter accounts, they restrict fan participation to increasing brand awareness. And even though the app editions do allow users to tap, stroke, and otherwise physically fiddle with films in a new way, those touch-screen interactions do not expand relationships to the stories or characters. The touch-screen feels like a more personal interface than a remote control, but it still only allows users to navigate preprogrammed options and experiences. The violation of that expectation of intimacy can be quite alienating; indeed, I found that it made the worlds of the films feel even further out of reach.

These editions thus undermine the ethos of the app in the service of corporate synergy. Previous incarnations of the film app did not do this, or at least not to the same extent. When independent filmmakers and distributors like Kimmo Kuusniemi (*Promised Land of Heavy Metal*, 2009) and Stonehenge Productions (*Geek Mythology*, 2009) pioneered the first film apps, they approached them as a last resort for movies without theatrical or iTunes releases. These apps do not claim to produce new experiences of their films; rather Kuusniemi and Stonehenge are just trying to distribute them any way they can. By contrast, the Warner Bros. app editions disappoint because they promise a new form of spectatorial engagement they do not deliver. Advertisements for the *Inception* and *Dark Knight* app editions create an expectation that viewers will be able to "unlock the complete experience" of the movie. In fact, they subvert the logic of the app with repurposed bonus features borrowed from other digital platforms while reducing the intimacy potentially provided by the touch-screen interface to a mere illusion of active participation. In the end, physical contact enables us to do little more than relay a few snippets of dialogue through our social media accounts. Rather than having a complete experience of the film—whatever that means—we wind up reiterating corporate marketing in a peculiarly *dis*connected viewing experience. We try to tap the windows onto our filmic worlds, but the windows never really open, reminding us that no matter how intensely we feel the movies, they feel nothing for us.

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SEARCHING FOR *SOMEWHERE*

To Roland Barthes's "typology of the pleasures of reading" must be added the experience of film-related browsing online, involving a cinema viewer who, like Barthes, feels "out of place," an "anachronic subject, adrift" in new questions, problems, delights, and banalities. In *The Pleasure of the Text* (Hill and Wang), first published in French in 1973, Barthes defines a loose methodology—"to graze, to browse scrupulously, to rediscover"—that resonates with the way digital technology is interweaving viewing and reading. A website like Mubi ("your online cinema anytime, anywhere") offers a Notebook section for critical commentary as well as festival notices, movies for rent from the cloud, and even a Garage section intended as a sort of online film school. Meanwhile, the convergence of cable and wirelessly networked Blu-ray players connects the Home Box Office with Netflix Instant and Vudu, an HD streaming video service which presents reviews from Rotten Tomatoes and Wikipedia entries in tandem with its library of movies. Even the retro experience of going out to the cinema for a screening at a specific time in a particular location involves the web, both beforehand (look up the trailer on YouTube) and afterwards (click through Metacritic and Twitter to see what reviewers and the community of viewers are saying). The browser in this post-cinema domain of interconnection recalls Barthes's "obsessive" category of reader, who delights in "the voluptuous release of the letter, of secondary, disconnected languages, of metalanguages."

As a case study in the ethos of browsing, I've been following Sofia Coppola's curiosity, *Somewhere*, which has traveled from the Venice Film Festival to an unprofitable limited release in U.S. theaters, a decidedly mixed reception online, and a fragile digital half-life on sites like CinemaNow that make one's living room into a hotel showing "Hollywood's Latest Hits" in the weeks leading up to their DVD release dates. I first watched *Somewhere* in one of those middle-American antique cinemas that's been converted into an Indiewood venue and offers simulcasts of opera from La Scala, theater from London, and cult late-night movies. It was actually a Twitter message from an Australian writer friend and Coppola diehard in San Francisco that sent me off to a February matinee in Cleveland Heights, Ohio through a decidedly nonvirtual blizzard, wiping snowflakes off the screen as smileys zipped back and forth across three time zones.

Then I watched a film in which the two primary characters, celebrity actor Johnny Marco (Stephen Dorff) and his daughter Cleo (Elle Fanning), bond by watching television together in a luxury hotel in Italy (a dubbed version of *Friends*) and by playing the video game *Guitar Hero 5* on a Playstation 3. Perhaps Coppola was thinking of later audiences who might play the DVD or stream the movie through their game consoles, and watch people like themselves playing video games in a self-reflexive reverie that Andy Warhol might have approved. When the characters switch to playing Wii tennis, Cleo misses the jokes about Martina Navratilova, whose sports stardom is already part of a vintage world—as the *Guitar Hero* franchise will soon be too, having been discontinued by its producer, Activision, and going the way of the arcade version of the game a kid plays in Tokyo in *Lost in Translation* (2003).

In another film curious about Japan, *Sans Soleil* (1983), Chris Marker in voiceover says that, after much global journeying, "only banalities" still interest him, and watching such provocative banalities—and watching watchers watching them—is what a lot of *Somewhere* is about. After Marco breaks his arm falling down some stairs at the Chateau Marmont hotel in Los Angeles, there's nearly five minutes of blond twins pole-dancing for the actor, followed in short order by nearly three minutes of his blond daughter skating at the Pickwick Ice arena. (The cinema was so empty I didn't bother anyone by using my iPod's stopwatch to time the shots.) Marco claps appreciatively for both acts of twirling girls, but in the latter sequence he's also checking his phone for text messages. Later on, we glimpse Cleo packing her tennis racket into dad's car for summer camp, recalling the blondes' earlier routine pretending to paddle each other with similar sports equipment. These sequences are more subtle than they sound—the pole-dancing couldn't be called prurient and the visual analogy between it and the ice-skating isn't overbearing. But the film's tone of tender parricide remains consistent. Dads in particular and men in general are rarely awful in Sofia Coppola's comedies, but here, as in *The Virgin Suicides* (1999) and *Lost in Translation*, they're a bit confused and helpless, accident-prone. These are movies that operate through dramatic irony: the viewer is meant to

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Slowdown
Somewhere. © 2010 Somewhere LLC. DVD: Focus Features.

draw threads together that the characters themselves remain mostly unable to connect.

I saw *Somewhere* around the same time as another hypnotizing film about voyeurism designed for nostalgic consumption on a gigantic screen, and deliberately planned as an all-out assault on short attention spans, Eugène Green's 2009 *The Portuguese Nun*. (As yet undistributed in the U.S., the film screened at the Cleveland Cinematheque, a rep gem near Case Western Reserve University.) Both films are oddly conservative in the specific sense that they jokingly emphasize the venality of quick pleasures and appear to promote child-rearing as a remedy for our drifting world. This is a cinema of slowing down. It's not enough to watch, to browse like a tourist through one's own life: hang around, linger, stick to something, somewhere, someone. Yet while Green's film consistently confronts its viewers, its towering faces often

locked in "eye contact" with the audience, *Somewhere* presents a very different set of images, such as an infinitesimally slow zoom-in on Marco breathing under a face mold for an acting part, his eyes covered, the camera a hovering attentive presence, less like a fan or a stalker and more like a Barthesian pleasure-seeker.

Both films are intended to be comic, but *Somewhere* more clearly indulges in cinematic in-jokes and intertextual nods. When Marco passes a car accident without stopping, *Somewhere* conjures with Godard's *Breathless* (1960); when his voice is washed away by helicopter noise as he tells Cleo "sorry I haven't been around," Coppola is surely winking at *La dolce vita* (1960); when we're watching Marco and Cleo drive around town, it's more than the daughters's name that recalls another film about demi-celebrities filmed in a subtle illusion of real time, Agnès Varda's *Cleo from 5 to 7* (1962). These threads hang loosely rather than being pulled tight, just as *Lost in Translation* played a series of contemporary variations on and inversions of *The Graduate* (1967), if you cared to notice them. At any rate, this is a film slow enough to invite reveries of other films into the picture, an intertextual game that continues afterwards and inevitably migrates to the web. It's surely true that online commentary and new exhibition platforms are retuning the perusal experience in significant ways, yet all literate films invite their viewers to browse through cinema history, especially ones like *Somewhere* that self-define as belated or even deliberately "minor" works.

Echoing Barthes, "electrofringe" new-media artists whose work involves sampling and recycling have coined the term "pleasure of the intertext," a pleasure in link-making and source-hunting. This enjoyment is itself fluid; in particular it modulates over time. I went back to the theater to watch *Somewhere* again the day after my first visit, having reviewed *The Virgin Suicides* on Netflix Instant and *Lost in Translation* on DVD, and browsed through *Breathless* and *Cleo from 5 to 7* for quick points of reference, searching for interlinking images or sequences. *Lost in Translation*, of course, contains a scene in which the characters watch *La dolce vita* and I followed the Italian thread, moving from Fellini to Antonioni—first *L'avventura* (1960) and then the photography scene from *Blow-Up* (1966) on YouTube (for reference purposes it's sometimes easier to locate a clip online), which shares with Coppola's films a certain wry tone about unconsummated sex. Think of the desperate girls and boys in *The Virgin Suicides*, the non-affair in *Lost in Translation*, and, in *Somewhere*, the scene in which Marco falls asleep going down on a party girl because he's taken pain pills. Back in the theater for my second viewing of *Somewhere*, I became less interested in its connections to the New Wave and more compelled by its Italianate meanderings, the way Coppola obviously remembers how Fellini and Antonioni explore the empty lives of lost and confused rich people.

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Somewhere is a remarkably divisive film that provokes genuine arguments amongst friends—plus it's actively despised by some reviewers, denizens of the Twitterverse, and members of various online user communities. The Daily section on Mubi aggregates *Somewhere*'s reception into a narrative summary, providing links to over thirty critics and bloggers, including one gendered fight over "Rich Girl's Cinema." The popcorn icon at Rotten Tomatoes, which aggregates general user feedback, gives *Somewhere* an approval rating just under 50%. Is *Somewhere* "a fascinating, mature, beautiful work" (Salon) or "a triumph of tedium" (*Orlando Sentinel*)? Beyond revealing a thwarted Will to Power among first responders who now find themselves in the role of online chorus rather than tastemakers and gatekeepers, as well as suggesting evidence that female critics consistently liked the film, the split on the aggregation sites forms a kind of collective recommendation, a reason to go see a film that has upset some and delighted others. Rotten Tomatoes, like Metacritic, operates on the surface as a gigantic focus group and a vehicle for consensus through number-crunching (approval ratings for *The King's Speech* hover around 95%), but in fact provides a huge range of individual opinions and minority reports.

One of the user terms for Twitter, the "hive mind," suggests that research can be increasingly interactive, sometimes overwhelming so. Microblogging sites like Twitter may contain the Barthesian enjoyment of "metalanguages" par excellence, and, despite its strict parameters of 140 characters of text, it has proved effective for film critics, Roger Ebert being only the most obvious and widely read figure. Twitter works well as a supplement to RSS feeds for media coverage of film—as a conveniently one-stop way to take in information from magazines, production companies, distributors, festivals, critics, and even individual cinemas and filmmakers. I like to consult Twitter about movies I'm watching by sending status updates and messages to various interlocutors and correspondents from London to the West Coast (in addition to discussions via email, online chat, text messaging). During my discussions about *Somewhere*, a cinematographer pal in L.A. suggested, over a series of private messages on Twitter, a comparison between Gordon Willis's color palette and the look of *Somewhere*, a connection that's especially intriguing because of Willis's work as Director of Photography on Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather* series. (Another potential act of parricide in *Somewhere* involves its "European" style as a throwback to the kind of New Wave-influenced

BROWSING

Left column. Top: *Lost in Translation*. © 2003 Lost in Translation Inc. DVD: Universal Studios. Second: *Cleo from 5 to 7*. © 1992 Agnès Varda et enfants. DVD: Criterion Collection. Third: *Jeanne Dielman 23, quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles*. © Chemeh I.S./Paradise Films. DVD: Criterion Collection. Fourth: *La dolce vita*. © International Media Films Inc./Third Millennium Films Inc. DVD: Koch Lorber Films. Right column: *Somewhere*. © 2010 Somewhere LLC. DVD: Focus Features.

American film that might have been made in the early 1970s by the elder Coppola's original, failed American Zoetrope production company, and Marco's trip to Italy might be read as a joke at the expense of the traditional Sicilian wedding in *The Godfather*.) The cinematographer also rightly mentioned Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* (1975) as a potential precursor for *Somewhere*'s gradual unfolding of tasks from daily life such as cooking, an amusing notion in the specific sense that this analogy, if accurate, would associate the character of Johnny Marco with prostitution, the occupation of Akerman's title character. Certainly both films tend to ambush the unwary viewer and provoke similar accusations of being deliberately boring.

Searching through Twitter for references to *Somewhere* reveals a buzzing cloud of haters (not all of them clearly male). What follows is a selection, a snapshot of Twitter comments posted during a four-day period, February 3–7, found using the search terms "Sofia Coppola" and the hash tag "#Somewhere." "Oh yeah, Sofia Coppola's 'Somewhere' is the most pretentious film I've ever seen. 'Lost In Translation' was ALL Bill Murray–she's a hack." "Formula 51 was the perfect palate cleanser after watching Sofia Coppola's snoozefest Somewhere." "The urge to call out 'Boringgg!' while watching Sofia Coppola's 'Somewhere' was almost overwhelming in parts." "Damn it Sofia Coppola why do you think entertaining the audience is beneath you." "Whatever you do .... don't go see the movie #somewhere#worst_movie_ever." "Saw #Coppola film #Somewhere - why more than 2 minutes of her film contains pole dancing is beyond me... really, what's the point?" On the other hand, there's also more thoughtful stuff: "Wow #Somewhere ..no plot, no real storyline, no gimmicks.. I think it worked." "Sofia Coppola's style is really slow, simple, and melancholy." "Sofia Coppola effectively portrays the loneliness of being a girl in a world that knows how to use you but not how to value & understand you." "Sofia Coppola é o Edward Hopper do cinema." The more minimalist style of commentary that flourishes on Twitter turns up too: "Sofia coppola :-)" and "♥.♥ Stephen dorff ♥.♥ #somewhere." In my digging on Twitter I also found a link to a blog with a nice description of Coppola's style: "camera dwells insistently on a very particular kind of indolence, consciously overextending shots" (www.imitationlife.com).

This is the kind of browsing that Stuart Klawans, the film critic for *The Nation*, deplores as the enemy of film when he writes: "Audiovisual materials exist everywhere at once today—they're as common as air, and are consumed about as thoughtfully" ("Readjustments," April 18, 2011). This gloominess has its flip side in Roger Ebert's notion that blogging and online commentary has unleashed a "golden age of movie criticism" (hblogs.suntimes.com/ebert/2010/04/the_golden_age_of_movie_critic.html). Writing in this magazine, Jonathan Rosenbaum (spring 2007) reflected on living in a "transitional period when enormous paradigmatic changes should be engendering new concepts." But the Barthes-style ethos and the pleasures of browsing feel less like the basis for a novel critical concept than a simple matter of "The Way We Live Now," to cite the title of a 1986 short story by Susan Sontag that was obviously designed to obsolesce into a time capsule.

For me, the constant interweaving of online and offline experiences as a viewer and a reader involves imbrications of film and post-cinema that suggest a generational shift to digital culture as a fait accompli in which DVDs, never mind cinemas, seem outmoded. Even the idea of gathering round the television might seem old-fashioned compared with buying episodes of *Mad Men* or *Dexter* from AMC or Showtime straight from iTunes. In a similar fashion, IFC presents on-demand digital download services for movies like Gaspar Noé's *Enter the Void* (2009), while other oddities and rarities not currently available on DVD, like John Frankenheimer's *Seconds* (1966) and Jules Dassin's *Up Tight!* (1968), were recently made available on the Instant services of Amazon and Netflix, respectively. Netflix, for its part, has begun to commission original content—a remake of the BBC's 1990 series, *House of Cards*, produced by David Fincher—that will be streamed first rather than screened or broadcast, and Google's YouTube has followed suit with a hundred-million dollar investment to compete directly with cable.

Coppola reportedly rejected her father's advice to use digital video on *Lost in Translation* and decided to use film because it was more "romantic." Her filmmaking style to date, apart from *Marie Antoinette* (2006), involves carefully framed, classically shot compositions. In many ways, *Somewhere* is a deliberately old-fashioned film that weaves itself into a tapestry of art-cinema history. Having burnished its arthouse reputation by winning a prestigious prize at a European festival, the film relies on the persistence of an audience with a taste for browsing the cinematic past. Yet, on reflection, it's exactly the film's retro qualities that can be enhanced—made still more elastic, adaptable, and oddly durable—in the digital afterlife when it becomes viewable and reviewable at will on iPads, PlayStations, laptops, wireless Blu-ray players, and the like. With a progress bar and pause features, post-cinema-goers can freeze frames, loop back, consult other films, and resume viewing in an enhanced intertexual delirium—or maybe just watch the movie.

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DOVZHENKO: FOLK TALE AND REVOLUTION

Like Sergei Eisenstein's *Strike* (1925), Alexander Dovzhenko's *Zvenigora* (1928) is an amazing early work that dropped out of sight for many years. It was *Potemkin* (1925) and *October* (1928), *Arsenal* (1929) and *Earth* (1930), that won Eisenstein and Dovzhenko their international renown in the heroic period of Soviet cinema; and it was not until the Khrushchev Thaw, after they were both dead, that *Strike* and *Zvenigora* began to be shown again. Eisenstein seems to have disowned *Strike*—in his 1934 essay "Through Theater to Cinema" he wrote that it "floundered about in the flotsam of a rank theatricality"—but Dovzhenko said in his 1939 "Autobiography" that *Zvenigora* "has remained my most interesting picture for me. I made it in one breath—a hundred days. Unusually complicated in structure, eclectic in form, the film gave me, a self-taught production worker, the fortuitous opportunity of trying myself out in every genre. It was a catalogue of all my creative abilities."

While Eisenstein theorized the "montage of attractions," Dovzhenko was arguably the better practitioner. Eisenstein started in the theater, and montage, though central to his theory of film and usually taken as a theory of film editing, started as a theory of theater, the "montage of attractions" he expounded in a 1923 essay—attractions as in a circus or variety show, different sorts of performance assembled together, different ways of engaging and affecting the audience arranged in succession to produce a composite effect.[†] In its mix of documentary realism and caricatural stylization, *Strike* exemplified the "montage of film attractions," but Eisenstein apparently felt that the stylization was too theatrical and went on to make the more consistently realistic *Potemkin*. In the theater Eisenstein saw himself less as a director of actors than of spectators he endeavored to sway, and he was no different as a film director: he remained chiefly concerned with making an impact, eliciting a response. All his films are highly rhetorical, all theatrical in the way they play to the audience. But none after *Strike* combines dissimilar modes of representation so markedly: if *Potemkin* adopts a more consistent semi-documentary mode, *Ivan the Terrible* (1944–46) adopts a more consistent semi-operatic mode. Except for *Strike*, montage in Eisenstein's films is not so much montage of attractions as the quick, assertive editing of shots.

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Dovzhenko was born in a Ukrainian village, the son of illiterate peasants, their seventh child but, by the time he was eleven, the oldest surviving one. He went to school and became a teacher, which exempted him from fighting in World War I. In the complicated strife following the Soviet revolution he was with the Borotbists, a faction of Ukrainian nationalists espousing a home-grown, peasant-based Communism. He served as a Soviet diplomat in Warsaw and Berlin, but his mediating position between Bolsheviks and nationalists was made untenable when the Red Army slaughtered nationalist prisoners who refused to join its ranks, and his diplomatic stint came to an end. He turned to the arts—he studied with George Grosz in Berlin—and found a congenial atmosphere among artists and writers in the flourishing Ukrainian culture of the 1920s; he published caricatures and had aspirations as a painter before he started on his career as a filmmaker.

Zvenigora was his breakthrough film. It boldly mixes the legendary and the contemporary, the traditional and the experimental, the manner of Ukrainian folk poetry and the methods of avant-garde theater and cinema. The administrators at VUFKU, the Kiev studio that produced it, didn't know what to make of it and sought the opinion of Eisenstein and Pudovkin, who were invited to a screening in Moscow. "*Zvenigora* leaps!" Eisenstein wrote in his account of the occasion. "As the film goes on it pleases me more and more. I'm delighted by the personal manner of its thought, by its astonishing mixture of reality with a profoundly national poetic imagination. Quite modern and mythological at the same time. Humorous and heroic." The film opens with mounted Ukrainian Cossacks from the seventeenth century riding into view in magical slow motion; an old grandfather joins them as they shoot Poles down from trees and search for a treasure reputedly buried in the Zvenigora hills. But the grandfather also lives in the present, the time of world war, revolution, and civil war, and he has two grandsons, one a revolutionary who extends his hand to German soldiers in the trenches as fellow workers, the other a reactionary who puts on a suicide act before a paying bourgeois audience in the West, all eager to watch him shoot himself on stage, so that he can raise funds for an expedition back to his native land in quest of its buried ancestral treasure. More than any Eisenstein film besides *Strike*, Dovzhenko's *Zvenigora* has the stylistic diversity, the bent for disparity, of the montage of attractions.

Midsummer wreaths, Rosksana, suicide act and audience, Oksana and the grandfather on the revolutionary train. DVD: Mr Bongo Films (U.K.).

The Cossacks on horseback, one of them carrying a bandura, invoke right at the start, as Ray Uzwyshyn observes, the Ukrainian tradition of bardic song (uwf.edu/ruzwyshyn/dovzhenko/Zvenyhora.htm). Laying stress on the Dada connection, Uzwyshyn sees the slow motion as a mockery in the vein of René Clair's *Entr'acte* (1924) and takes the whole sequence as a burlesque of the Cossacks and their bardic tradition similar to Duchamp's mustache on the Mona Lisa. But Dovzhenko's slow motion lends the opening a strange, entrancing sort of majesty—more akin to Jean Vigo than René Clair—and the jokes about such things as shooting down Poles perched on trees blend laughter with a fairy-tale wonderment. "Humorous and heroic," as Eisenstein said, the humorous accompanying the heroic as often in epic poetry, the humorous qualifying but not ridiculing or repudiating the heroic. Dovzhenko brings to the bardic tradition a modernist sensibility—he was certainly aware of the international avant-garde, Dada and Surrealism as well as Cubism, Constructivism, and the rest—and he does a kind of parody of Ukrainian folk poetry, but in a fashion essentially serious. And he doesn't so much parody the legendary as level it with the contemporary, put it incongruously together with the actual. Like Manet in *Olympia*, he gives an old form a new content.

When it shifts from the legendary past to the present time, the film goes into its most lyrical passage of Ukrainian folklore. We may think we are still in the realm of legend when maidens in festive peasant garb, one named Oksana singled out among them, perform the Midsummer ritual of Ivan Kupala and send wreaths of flowers with lit candles floating down the river. "Destiny flows by," the intertitles read. "Oksana watches it." Time-honored belief has it that a maiden's wreath caught by a young man signifies marriage, while an overturned wreath or a candle blown out by the wind foretells misfortune. Oksana is alarmed to see that the old grandfather catches her wreath and throws it back into the water after blowing out the candle. Between these two figures of traditional Ukraine there seems to be a split, and in the next scene we are introduced to the two grandsons personifying a split, Pavlo the reactionary and Tymishko the revolutionary. Then comes another lyrical passage, a bucolic celebration of the land, its fruits and its beasts and its people, the growing of wheat and of children: a poem of fertility expressing in material terms much the same sentiments that the Midsummer ritual expressed in mystical terms. Thus *Zvenigora* proceeds, as a montage of scenes, of whole sequences more than of shots within a sequence, scenes linked together in their diversity by a play of correspondences and cross-references.

The idyll of the land is interrupted by a bell calling the men to the world war. Pavlo stays home with the grandfather and the two go digging for the Zvenigora treasure, but a fat general stands above them and tells them digging is forbidden. Tymishko becomes a soldier, though he shakes hands with the enemy in the midst of battle and challenges the authority of a frail old general who orders his execution to no avail and then just topples over. The actor who plays the old grandfather also plays the frail old general, and even if we don't recognize him in this other role, at some subliminal level we register the parallel. The digging for a national treasure, the gesture of solidarity with the enemy, the fat and the frail generals, the collapse of old authority: like much else in the film, these are symbolic, theatrical, frankly unrealistic representations of reality—reality in the mode of legend, of bardic song, but still reality rendered with the physical directness, the documentary immediacy peculiar to the film image.

On a horse painted white Pavlo leads nationalist troops in the civil war, and Tymishko and the Communists retreat from the village. The revolution fights back, as the film represents it, armed with the pick digging in the mines, the hammer at work in the factories and the sickle in the fields, the industry and agriculture that are the real treasure of Zvenigora, as Tymishko learns. Pavlo goes abroad and, after his profitable suicide act, returns and persuades the grandfather to sabotage the advancing train symbolic of revolution. But Tymishko is on that train and Oksana is with him—the old man caught her wreath, it seems, for the benefit of his good grandson—and the grandfather joins them on board. Pavlo faces us as if we were the audience for his suicide performance, and now actually puts a bullet through his head. *Zvenigora* is a complex national allegory. If the grandfather personifies old Ukraine, so does young Oksana, who is doubled in the legendary Roksana, heroine of a story related by the grandfather and visualized in misty, layered images like pictographs excavated from the distant past. The grandfather is the old fixated on tradition, Oksana the old with its eyes on the future; he is the old set in its ways, she the old that is continually renewed. In the original Zvenigora folk tale (as outlined by Uzwyshyn) a poor peasant discovers a treasure in a cave and, warned that it is cursed, takes only two gold coins from it, which are enough for him to prosper; tempted to go back for more, he finds snakes and vipers in the cave, and the wind howls: "Take only what you need." The grandfather's digging may be construed as the desire to hoard, to accumulate riches selfishly, but the treasure he dreams of is real and can be made to yield riches for all. He belongs on the train with Oksana and Tymishko in a final alliance of old and new.

ARSENAL, EARTH

Arsenal: mother with no sons, disabled veteran and speaking horse, laughing gas, rush to the grave, defying death.
Bottom right, *Earth*: lovers in the moonlight. DVDs: Mr Bongo Films (U.K.).

"There was a mother who had three sons," *Arsenal* begins. A peasant woman is alone at home in a held posture of distress. "There was a war." Soldiers on a train travel to the front, and in village streets women stand still and a one-legged veteran walks on crutches with a child following. "And the mother had no sons." A woman trying to sow a large field all by herself totters and falls to the ground. The intertitles assume the manner of folk poetry, and the images are stylized in kind, theatrical, hieratic, with a distinctive use of immobility as a way to counterpoint and crystallize movement, and at the same time real. A soldier in the trenches under the influence of laughing gas confronts the audience like an actor on a stage. A woman beating her hungry children in frustration is intercut with a disabled veteran beating his horse in a field lying fallow, and the horse tells him he's hitting the wrong target. Horses speak in *Arsenal* as in any folk tale.

The bardic mode, as Uzwyshyn notes, tends in *Zvenigora* toward "comedy and Menippean satire" and in *Arsenal* toward "lament and tragedy" (uwf.edu/ruzwyshyn/dovzhenko/Arsenal.htm). *Zvenigora* ends happily with the hero and heroine together and the old man reconciled to the new order; *Arsenal* ends with the hero, also named Tymishko and played by the same actor, indomitably baring his chest before gunfire in the rebel arsenal's last stand, symbolically defying yet actually meeting his death. To a greater extent than any other Soviet portrayal of revolution, *Arsenal* is tragic, terrible, sorrowful. Its most dynamic depiction of revolutionary action is a rush to the grave. A dying Red soldier asks to be buried at home, and his comrades, together with speaking horses "flying with all the speed of our twenty-four legs," hurry him across a wintry embattled landscape to his final rest. Dovzhenko's mastery of the rhythms of motion and stillness is manifest in this dazzling fast-cut sequence in which militant excitement joins hands with mournful sadness. If *Zvenigora* mixes genres and styles more diversely than *Arsenal*, is more of a montage of attractions, *Arsenal* cuts more disjunctively than *Zvenigora*, is more of a montage of shots. In *Arsenal* more than in *Zvenigora*, and in *Earth* more than in *Arsenal*, Dovzhenko treats shots as self-contained units, each holding the screen on its own and carrying equal weight, the ensemble forming an aggregate space like a medieval altarpiece or a Cubist painting.

Cinema is both theatrical, a medium of actors performing for an audience, and documentary, a medium of images recording actual appearances. Like Jean-Luc Godard, like Ousmane Sembène, like Andy Warhol, like Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, Dovzhenko pushes in both directions at once, and his films, like few others of his time, combine overt theatricality with vivid documentary imagery. Take the great love scene in *Earth*, the sole scene in the movies that portrays not just love's intimacy but also its commonality, not just its personal but also its sacramental quality: a sequence of lovers standing immobile in the country moonlight after a day's work, one peasant couple after another posing theatrically for the camera and yet exhibiting, in a steadfast gesture of solemn bliss, the subjective as well as shared reality of love. Or consider the way that, in *Ivan* (1932) or *Aerograd* (1935), the documentary rendering of a massive hydroelectric dam being built on the river Dnieper, or of the Siberian frontier with its vast ancient forests and its airplanes in the sky heralding the future, is punctuated by the theatricality of characters looking at the camera and addressing us in the audience, implicating us in their struggle, facing our judgment, acknowledging their shame, asking us to witness their grief, reciting poetry to us in summation of their experience.

Earth was Dovzhenko's last silent film and is generally —and justly—regarded as his masterpiece. It is a marvel, a poem of change and of permanence, of death and of life, epic and lyric, tribal and revolutionary, passionate and imperturbable. But it was not a lone masterpiece: worthy to stand beside it are *Zvenigora* and *Arsenal*, which compose with it a kind of trilogy, *Ivan*, which augments that into a tetralogy, and *Aerograd*, for once made outside his native Ukraine. Mr Bongo released last year a new DVD of *Earth* and has now brought out DVDs of *Zvenigora* and *Arsenal* that are fuller and of better visual quality than any previously available. (The English subtitles could use improvement, however. They are often rather flat and at times unclear. The lines about the woman and the war and the three sons quoted above are from the old version of *Arsenal*; the new subtitles weaken the bardic tone. "It's not me you want to strike at, old man" is what, if memory serves, the horse tells the man in the old version; what we get now is "You've lost your touch, Ivan," which misses the point.) It is to be hoped that there will soon be DVDs, if not of the whole Dovzhenko corpus, at least of *Ivan* and *Aerograd*.

† S. M. Eisenstein, "The Montage of Attractions," in *Writings, 1922–34*, vol. 1 of *Selected Works*, ed. and trans. Richard Taylor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 33–38. See also "The Montage of Film Attractions," 39–58. Tom Gunning borrowed the term "attractions" for his theory of early cinema.

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DVD DATA *Arsenal*. Director: Alexander Dovzhenko, 1929. Publisher: Mr Bongo Films (U.K.). £17.99, 1 disc.

Zvenigora. Director: Alexander Dovzhenko, 1928. Publisher: Mr Bongo Films (U.K.). £17.99, 1 disc.

DOGTOOTH: THE FAMILY SYNDROME

MARK FISHER ARGUES THAT YORGOS LANTHIMOS'S FILM POWERFULLY CRITIQUES FAMILY LIFE

When Natascha Kampusch, the Austrian woman who was abducted at the age of ten, sensationally escaped her captivity a few years ago, many were surprised that she showed sympathy for her captor. Some psychologists invoked Stockholm Syndrome, the so-called "coping mechanism" that leads some hostages to identify with their captors, to explain her ambivalence. But Kampusch's abduction posed a set of uncomfortable questions which the easy invocation of Stockholm Syndrome evades: couldn't a child's feelings of sympathy and love toward its parents be the result of just the same psychological mechanisms? What, after all, is the difference between Stockholm Syndrome and the primary socialization undertaken by the family supposed to be? One answer to this might be that, while the family typically produces neurotic normalization (or worse), Stockholm Syndrome can induce a revolutionary subjectivity—a process that Paul Schrader explored in his 1988 film, *Patty Hearst: Her Own Story*, about the heiress turned militant. The concept of Stockholm Syndrome depoliticizes the kind of transformation that Hearst underwent, while simultaneously naturalizing the "ordinary" family.

The shadow of a very abnormal family hangs over Yorgos Lanthimos's film, *Dogtooth*. It is impossible to watch the film without thinking of the Josef Fritzl case—a parallel that becomes uncanny when you realize that the screenplay was written before the Fritzl story became known to the world. Like Fritzl, the father (Christos Stergiogiou) in *Dogtooth*—neither he, his wife (Michele Valley), nor their three adult children are ever named—keeps his son (Hristos Passalis) and two daughters (Aggeliki Papoulia, Mary Tsoni) totally isolated from the outside world. Their confinement is somewhat less austere than that suffered by Fritzl's children: the main setting of *Dogtooth* is a large country house with a swimming pool. But, from the point of view of the audience if not of the young characters themselves, the house and its grounds quickly come to seem suffocatingly claustrophobic.

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The first scenes are reminiscent of Dennis Potter's television play *Blue Remembered Hills* from 1979, in which, disconcertingly, adult actors play children. But even though there are all kinds of temptations to read *Dogtooth* allegorically, they are best resisted: these are not adult actors in the roles of children; the strangeness is of another kind. The actors are playing adults who in all respects except physical maturation have not been able to grow up. The actors do a marvelously unsettling job in capturing the semi-autism of children—their only partial mastery of emotional literacy, their sudden bursts of violence, their competitiveness, their unguarded affection—and the disturbing discrepancy between physical and behavioral maturity is a main cause of the constant feeling of unease that *Dogtooth* generates. It also serves as a reminder of the extent to which human child-rearing involves behavior modification.

So far as we can tell, the father's abuse is limited to physical confinement and psychological control; there is no suggestion of the incestuous assaults committed by the real-life Fritzl. (It is not entirely clear whether the mother is also a victim in some way or simply her husband's co-conspirator.) It is the father's initial desire to prevent incest, to see that his son's sexual needs are in some sense "properly" met, that leads toward the catastrophic disintegration of the closed world. The father pays Christina (Anna Kalaitzidou), the security guard at the factory at which he works in a senior managerial capacity, to have sex with his son—the first of several disturbing sex scenes in the film, which are disquieting precisely because of a lack of either passion or pathology. There is a dutifulness about sex in *Dogtooth*. We might expect Christina to be somewhat detached, but the son also merely goes through the motions. And when, later, we see the father and the mother having intercourse, the act—which the pair perform while listening to a Walkman—is again devoid of any ardor; on another occasion, they watch hardcore pornography in a similarly aseptic fashion. The incestuous scenes which eventually take place between the two daughters have the quality of a childhood game. By this time, the father has decided that no further outside influ-

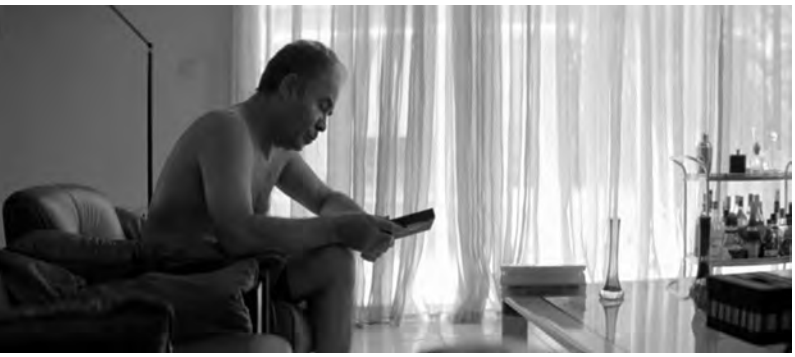
Walled garden
Dogtooth. Courtesy of Verve Pictures.

ence can be risked, and, in a chillingly clinical phrase, he tells the mother that he had "been considering assigning the task [of meeting the son's sexual needs] to the elder one," before concluding that it would be better if the son seemed to come to this decision himself. The son does so but, once more, the ensuing sex between the siblings lacks any transgressive charge.

While Fritzl was an horrific example of what Jacques Lacan calls Père Jouissance, the perverse Father who enjoys without limits, the obscene obverse of the Law, the father in *Dogtooth* is a rather different figure. He is not so much Père Jouissance as Papa Dada. Dadaism delighted in exaggerating the pompous absurdity of the ceremonies that authority needs in order to legitimate itself, and Lanthimos's anatomization of patriarchal power in *Dogtooth* partakes of the same spirit of coldly savage caricature. The father in the film is not the underside of the Law so much as its parodic extension. Everything in the family's world—from sex to language to the use of mouthwash—becomes subject to a precise ritualized control that becomes all the more ludicrous the more solemnly its arbitrary diktats are observed.

One can only speculate about the father's motives, since he is never called upon to give an account of them: the children naturally take for granted the bizarre situation in which they find themselves, because they have always lived inside it; while, apart from Christina, the outside world remains unaware of their predicament. Alone in the family, it is the father who moves between the private and the public world, traveling from his familial despotism to his job in a factory. Unlike someone like serial killer Ed Gein (a psychotic almost entirely detached from any kind of consensual reality), but like Fritzl, the father in *Dogtooth* can move easily between his abuse den of horrors and the public realm of work. The Fritzl case reminds us that the generic distinctions between "realism" and "horror" do not necessarily differentiate the plausible from the impossible; nor do such divisions belong only to cultural modes. Part of what was traumatic about the Fritzl case, in fact, was that it breached the shared social fiction we use to make sense of the world. What erupted here was the obscene proximity of the unthinkable—a proximity not only in physical terms (a house of horrors on an everyday street) but in terms of the structure of the social (incest and murder in the heart of the family).

This is underscored in the tension between *Dogtooth*'s formal naturalism and its (apparently) Dada-like content. The camera lingers impassively, unobtrusively, as if it is performing a merely documentary function. There is neither a score nor any incidental music; all of the music is diegetically embedded. The actors are deadpan, undemonstrative. (At times, there is almost a feeling of reality TV—and after all, in their isolation, in their submission to a cruel and arbitrary regime, what do the children resemble if not *Big*



Papa Dada

Dogtooth. © 2009 Boo Productions/Centre Cinematographique Greque/Yorgos Lanthiamos/Horsefly Productions. DVD: Verve Pictures (U.K.).

Brother contestants, nowhere more so than when the father, after having set them a demeaning task, allows the "winner" to choose what the evening's entertainment will be, especially when that "entertainment" turns out to be watching a video of themselves?)

In *Dogtooth*, only Christina is in a position to question the father, because only she has any inkling of the two worlds that he moves between. But, in her encounters with him, she remains always submissive, the passive object of his exploitation and his enquiries; practically every sentence he speaks to her is a subordinating question: "Are you wearing that perfume I bought for you?" "Did you have a bath?" Rather like an ostensibly conscientious employee who secretly steals stationery, Christina's acts of subversion take place when the boss cannot see.

After servicing the son, Christina trades a headband for sexual favors from the eldest daughter—but when, on a subsequent visit, Christina attempts to repeat the trade, the daughter is more interested in the videotapes in the security guard's bag (*Jaws* and *Rocky*). Sensing how dangerous this contraband might be for the constricted interiority that the father has ruthlessly imposed, Christina at first refuses to hand them over, but relents when the eldest daughter blackmails her. In a strange echo of campaigners who lobbied for the banning of so-called "video nasties," it is the movies which end up destroying the children's contented insularity rather than their sexual activities. Christina's sexual experiments and subversions, her asking the eldest daughter to perform cunnilingus, do little to perturb the prelapsarian innocence of the three adult children. Since the genitals

possess no particular erotic or pathological charge for them, no associations of guilt or dirt, the act of licking is easily transferred to another part of the body—when the eldest daughter attempts to copy Christina's sexual advances, she licks her sister's shoulder. Unharmed by furtive sexual experimentation, the siblings cannot survive their exposure to *Jaws* and *Rocky*. Previously, the family VCR has been used only for watching home movies: one of the many closed feedback loops which had kept the children locked into obedient participation in the domestic rituals. After the eldest daughter secretly watches the films, she starts to act out scenes and repeat dialogue, its alien idioms soon interrupting the controlled language that the parents have imposed. When the father learns of the transgression, his punishment is brutal and sudden—he fastens one of the video cassettes to his hand and beats the eldest daughter about the head with it. He then visits Christina in her home and, after a moment of banal conversation, he unplugs her VCR from the wall and attacks her with it. Yet there is no returning to the sealed conditions which the films have contaminated. The children had been told that the only time it would be safe for them to leave the house would be when a "dogtooth" (canine) falls out. Perhaps inspired by the violence of *Rocky*, one night the eldest daughter smashes out some of her teeth using a dumb-bell, before hiding in the trunk of her father's car. She remains undiscovered next morning, and the film ends with a close-up of the trunk—with the suggestion that she may be on the brink of freedom in a world unlike anything she has ever known.

"It's very striking to see that, as the century draws to a close," Alain Badiou writes in *The Century* (Polity, 2007), "the family has once more become a consensual and practically unassailable value. The young love the family, in which, moreover, they now dwell until later and later. The German Green Party . . . at one time contemplated calling itself the 'party of the family'. Even homosexuals . . . nowadays demand insertion within the framework of the family, inheritance and 'citizenship'" (66). It is possible, despite all the parental cruelty, to read *Dogtooth* as a satire on the sociological tendency of the young to "dwell within the family until later and later." But the significance of the film, particularly in the decade of Fritzl, is to highlight what Badiou calls the "pathogenic" qualities of the family. For Badiou, the consolidation of the family has been part of a massive restoration of power and authority; instead of debating alternatives to the family as revolutionaries did during the radical moments of the twentieth century, the family has once again assumed a totally dominant ideological position, a position that the actual collapse of the nuclear family in western societies and the challenges to heterosexual normativity have done little to upset. "The overwhelming majority of child murders are carried out, not by sleazy unmarried paedophiles," Badiou reminds us, "but by parents, especially mothers. And the overwhelming majority of sexual abuse is incestuous, in this instance courtesy of fathers or stepfathers. But about this, seal your lips! Murderous mothers and incestuous fathers, who are infinitely more widespread than paedophile killers, are an unsettling intrusion into the idyllic portrait of the family, which depicts the delightful relationship between our citizen parents and their angelic offspring" (76).

There is, however, something perversely angelic about the "children" in *Dogtooth*. They appear angelic in part because they can engage in sexual activity without being corrupted by it. They have the state of radical innocence attributed to Adam and Eve before the Fall—they can have sex, but it is of no more significance than scattering seed. (Perhaps the parents' passionless sex is an attempt to return to this purely functional sexual activity.) "If you stay inside, you are protected," says the father, echoing the God of Genesis and his warnings about the dangers of eating from the Tree of Knowledge. But the high cost of this protection is evident: "protected" from the traumatic dimensions of sexuality, the children are also deprived of subjectivity and agency; "protected" from outside influence, the family collapses into incestuous involution. From the perspective of the patriarch who has so assiduously preserved the children's innocence, it is Christina who is the serpent, the bringer of knowledge and therefore of evil. We do not have to accept this contorted logic in order to regard Christina as somewhat cruel. We do now know what the father has told her, and, although Christina is blindfolded when she is taken to the house, she is still able to interact with the three children sufficiently to see that something is seriously amiss here. Whether it is motivated by boredom, malice, or simply a desire to revenge herself on the boss, Christina's behavior toward the eldest daughter is casually manipulative and not a little callous. She destroys the eldest daughter's world without assisting her to escape from it.

What disturbed some about Natascha Kampusch was her moral conservatism; soon after her release, she spoke of the benefits of being kept hostage—it meant, she said, that she could not smoke or fall into bad company. "I hope your kids have bad influences and develop bad personalities," the father spits at Christina, just after he has savagely beaten her. *If you stay inside, you are protected* is the slogan of social conservatism, and it is as if Lanthimos is demonstrating what the ideal conditions for such conservatism would actually need to be. The outside must be totally pathologized:

HOME MOVIE

Dogtooth. © 2009 Boo Productions/Centre Cinematographique Greque/Yorgos Lanthiamos/Horsefly Productions. DVD: Verve Pictures (U.K.).

the children have to become literally xenophobic, terrified of everything that lies beyond the limits of their "protected" enclave. *Dogtooth*'s study of the pathogenic family is also, then, a study of the psychology of captivity.

The children are not physically restrained from escaping the house. They are always tentatively testing the limits of their world, throwing objects over the hedges, but until the eldest's escape attempt, made possible by the forbidden fruit of the videotapes, they are neither able nor willing to step into the outside. What is it that prevents them? *Dogtooth* sometimes plays like the feral cousin of *The Truman Show* (1998), and like Truman (Jim Carrey), the children are kept captive by an elaborate mythology which plays upon their insecurities and anxieties. Reference is repeatedly made to a disappeared brother—did this brother ever exist? Has the father killed him? We are in no position to know, yet the fact that it seems perfectly plausible that a child murder may have taken place suggests how corrupted this weird Eden already is. In one of the most grotesquely comic scenes in the film, the father tears his suit and covers himself in fake blood, before telling the children that this lost brother has been killed by a house cat, "the most dangerous animal there is." (In an earlier, horrific scene, the son killed a cat which strayed onto the lawn with a pair of pinking shears.) The father, then, is engaged in a kind of ongoing extemporized Dadaist theater, like an inverted version of Guido (Robert Benigni) in *Life Is Beautiful* (1997). Whereas Guido attempts to protect his child by pretending that terrifying threats are just a game, the father in *Dogtooth* converts the mundane stuff of domestic life into something terrifying. The element of absurd theatricality here should not, however, distract us from the extent to which *Dogtooth* presents in an extreme form the ordinary gestures and habits, the storytelling and tricks of discipline, of so-called normal family life.

Control of language is of course crucial to the father's scheme, and, once again, there is something Dadaist about the way that the two parents manipulate words. But this is a paradoxically familial Dadaism which does violence to the consensually accepted meaning of words not to open up random juxtapositions or the asignifying material–sonorous power of the senseless word itself, but to contain the world within a solipsistic interiority. In the film's opening scene, the three children listen intently to a cassette player telling them that "a sea is a leather armchair with wooden arms like the one we have in our living room." Here is the strategy in a nutshell: the outside (the ocean) is always converted into the inside (a leather armchair). The inside can be frightening (pet cats become dangerous predators), but its meaning is established in advance, fixed by the father and mother's linguistic micro-despotism, even if sometimes they are forced into improvisations, as in this conversation:

ELDEST DAUGHTER: What's a pussy?
MOTHER: Where have you seen that word?
ELDEST DAUGHTER: I saw it on a video case, on top of the VCR.
MOTHER: It means a light . . .

There is humor in such exchanges, but it is not of the kind that will provoke much laughter. *Dogtooth*'s funny moments—and there are many of them—instead induce a queasy discomfort that bears some resemblance to the humor analyzed by Adam Kotsko in his book, *Awkwardness* (Zero Books, 2010). But where the comedy that Kotsko describes—in the films of Judd Apatow, or the television series *The Office* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*—ought only to produce squirms of embarrassment but ends up making us laugh, the scenes in *Dogtooth* solicit uneasy half-smiles at best. Toward the end of the film, we see the children perform a routine for their parents; the son plays acoustic guitar while the daughters dance. The son can actually play pretty competently, but the daughters' dancing is painfully gauche. They shuffle out of time like TV talent-show contestants whose performance is only broadcast to invite ridicule; they move like aliens who are familiar with the concept of dancing but have never actually seen it done; they throw themselves about like rag dolls, then the elder daughter—who could be reenacting scenes from *Rocky*—starts running on the spot. It is as unbearable as the famous Ricky Gervais dancing scene from *The Office*, but we are denied the release of laughter: the abusive situation and the genuinely pathetic quality of the two daughters prevent it. Besides, we are denied any point of identification, denied anyone on screen who could laugh with us—or whom we would want to share our laughter with. We move instead toward the profoundly discomfiting comedy of someone like Todd Solondz, before, mercifully, the mother says, "enough."

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ABSTRACT An analysis of Yorgos Lanthimos's *Dogtooth,* in which parents create a totally insular, weirdly theatrical, and sometimes brutal world for their children. To what extent does this blackly comic, almost Dadaist horror show show reveal wider truths about what Badiou calls today's "pathogenic" families?

KEYWORDS *Dogtooth,* Yorgos Lanthimos, cinema and family, horror, psychoanalysis and cinema

SUNSET WITH CHAINSAW

EVAN CALDER WILLIAMS PROPOSES A NEW WAY OF READING HORROR FILMS POLITICALLY

A young white woman runs screaming from a house, chased by a chainsaw-wielding man. She is rescued by a passing truck and pulls away, covered in blood and laughing hysterically, as the man remains alone in the road, swinging his weapon aimlessly in the air. Horror has its iconic moments, and this—the chase of Sally (Marilyn Burns) by Leatherface (Gunnar Hansen) that concludes Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974)—is surely one of them, its savage edge none the duller after nearly forty years. It is also the ending of one of the films most convincingly and frequently read politically, a crucial text for interpretation aiming to unpack the economic, sexual, racial, and social anxieties at work in what is clearly more than "just" an exploitation film. Carol Clover in *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton University Press, 1993) famously reads the scene's gender trouble in terms of her "Final Girl" theory: Sally is ultimately "saved through male agency," although she is not merely passive, having "qualities of character that enable her, of all the characters, to survive what has come to seem unsurvivable" (38–39). More recently, Kendall Phillips in *Projected Fears: Horror Films and American Culture* (Praeger, 2005) sees Sally's hysterical laughter as the only possible response of youth "left adrift without guidance" to "a world without hope" (120–21). His account recalls Robin Wood's hugely influential work on horror. In *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (Columbia University Press, 1986), Wood declares Leatherface and clan "representatives of an exploited and degraded proletariat" belonging to "a civilization condemning itself, through its popular culture, to ultimate disintegration" (94). Or, as the caption for a picture of Leatherface in Peter Hutching's recent *The Horror Film* (Longman, 2004) puts it more succinctly: "The proletariat strikes back" (122).

These interpretations exemplify what has become, since its emergence in the 1980s, a dominant tendency in horror-film scholarship, concerned above all with *horrible content*—and especially with who is threatening whom and how the given situation of danger can be understood allegorically in terms of resistance to the contemporary society. Thus 1970s low-budget horror films such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* have often been plausibly linked, for example, to the U.S. anti-war movement, their murderous villains personifying a messy rage against the social norms of a belligerent world order. In this way, critics have recuperated genre movies often derided or vilified for their "senseless" violence by arguing that they make serious political sense. For all its undoubted merits, this now-standard reading of horror is reductive and needs to be supplanted. It forecloses other, more provocative possibilities of interpretation and in particular it edges out stranger, aberrant horror movies that exploit and twist genre conventions, building uncanny visual environments resistant to being read allegorically. Two such films—*The Night of the Hunter* (Charles Laughton, 1955) and *House* (Nobuhiko Obayashi, 1977)—have just been reissued in the Criterion Collection; both are funny, pulpy, perverse children's stories, and the idiosyncrasies of their form, rather than the menace of their content, point to a different kind of political reading.

THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER

Charles Laughton's only film as director—a nightmare downriver chase of of two children by psychopathic fake preacher, Harry Powell (Robert Mitchum)—is routinely described as an oddball one-off, but even so its strangeness surprises from the very start. We begin in the night sky, with smiling heads of children hanging bodiless in front of the stars, replaced by the floating face of Rachel Cooper (Lillian Gish), the film's moral authority and protector of "the little things." Then, commencing from high above a rural neighborhood, we zoom straight into an open basement door and discover the bare legs of a murdered woman surrounded by young boys. The dizziness continues as the camera whips up above the ground again, establishing the pattern of making the most out of axial movements (as, later, with long shots of the preacher moving straight across the background horizon).

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Background materials

The Night of the Hunter. © 1955 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios Inc. DVD: Criterion Collection.

We dive again to the earth over which the preacher drives as he launches into a one-sided dialogue with God about the indeterminate number of widows he has killed ("six . . . twelve?"). In under the space of a minute and a half, a starry-eyed Christian parable and a cartography of murder. This is not just an odd horror film. Rather, it is one whose oddness threatens to, and ultimately does, overwhelm the conventions of the horror we came to see, in several ways.

Firstly, Laughton was influenced by D. W. Griffith and so effectively does *The Night of the Hunter* succeed in recreating look and feel of Griffith's films that it seems like a weird hybrid—a silent film *with speech added*, preserving the exaggerated gestures, facial mugging, and spatial sense yet adding a dialogue which, again and again, treads perilously close to histrionic silliness, consistently deflating the more laborious work of building up suspense.

Secondly, the film's production design and mise-en-scène are curiously variable, soft film-noir shadows giving way in one of the film's wilder moments to the visual announcement of the preacher's approach by his oversized, *Batman* signal-esque hat shadow on the childrens' bedroom wall. Such a *projection*—the sudden appearance in the

foreground of something hidden from our view—is even more significant in the remarkable river sequence: the children's panicked journey turns idyllic and pastoral before all menace is occluded by a series of images of indifferent animals: rabbits, frogs, turtles. The image of an outsized spider web serves as an emblem of the way fairy-tale fright gets fissured by all the placid animality.

Thirdly, such slippages between the background material and what is supposed to be the film's focus occurs on the level of genre as well. Elements that do not usually belong to horror films get mixed into this unique Southern Gothic concoction but somehow remain unabsorbed. *The Night of the Hunter* does not blend generic elements together so much as string them out in discrete sequence. At various moments the film is a surrealist short, a country fable, a film noir, a monster movie complete with torch-bearing mob, a musical, a "social problem" film about the Great Depression, a slapstick comedy, a tawdry melodrama, and, at its conclusion, an utterly deadpan, maudlin Christmas film. (Now *that* is horrifying.) What this means is, fourthly, that narrative progress is unusually ineffective in *The Night of the Hunter*. We move from cosmos to Christmas but because the film is so dominated by its cobweb fractures, we never fully leave one sequence where the film puts us early, at its darkest moment: down below the river, among swaying weeds that entwine with the hair of a mother whose throat has been slashed—the awful sight of it lost in the sheer loveliness of the image, as the camera hangs, reframes, and refuses to get back to the story waiting above.

HOUSE

It is a commonplace to speak of films "you have to see to believe." *House* can be seen and still not believed. The Criterion blurb calls it a "psychedelic ghost tale" that "might have been beamed to Earth from some other planet." It is also a film that exhibits a "pure cinema" of effects and techniques, and it is a joyous hijacking of all the tricks and potential delirium of the advertising trade. What results is a goofiness so profound it turns sinister, and a collapse of the gap between the sublime and the parodic—as when we watch, in the same shot, a sunset softly staining the clouds rich shades of orange and purple *and* a severed head flying through the air to bite the ass of her friend. It is gorgeous and cheap, ludic and disturbing.

In a terrific interview included as an extra, director Nobuhiko Obayashi notes that this film was intended, obliquely, as a skeptical response to the search for sequels to *Jaws* (1975): "a hit movie about shark attacks leads to one about bear attacks," complains Obayashi. "That's the best they can do." Like *The Night of the Hunter*, *House* is a film driven by the logic of childhood fear and vision—and specifically ideas suggested by the director's adolescent daughter. It is the story of a group of teenage girls, each named after a defining element of her character (Gorgeous, Kung Fu, Sweet) who go to a haunted house where, insane after the loss of her lover during World War II, the witchy aunt of one of the teens sets about doing them in, with the help of a fluffy white cat whose eyes glint green when it is time for the house to let loose its batty malevolence. As I cannot begin to succinctly describe how it is to watch *House*, I will just mention one demented moment. There is a piano that eats a girl playing it, while a jagged sunburst flashes, discordant music jangles, lightning strikes, and her disembodied head floats through the shot to remark about her disconnected kicking legs, "Oh, my! That's naughty." And that is far from an exceptional sequence.

Obayashi's background as both an experimental filmmaker—his excellent 1966 film *Emotion* is included on the disc—and an advertisement director help to explain this cinema of surface effects and how it relates to the horror genre. Beyond the stupefying array of showier special effects, projection tricks, motion in reverse, and complex cuts, nearly everything is bathed with that particular soft glow of the advertisement, such that a new toaster and a painting of a cat ceaselessly vomiting enough blood to flood a house are both shot as if on careful display for sale. Commodity fetishism transfers its look to a much more direct fetishism of large clocks who entrap girls. *House* is a horror film of pop acceleration, of vertiginous effects torn from their sources and divorced from causes, of "music too beautiful or sweet for a regular movie, or imagery that looked too pretty or fake" (to quote the Criterion interview). This combination of cloying sweetness and full-bore artifice was, according to the director, "our generation's version of a horror film."

As in *The Night of the Hunter*, background details of *House* always threaten to burst to the fore: out-of-focus skeletons dance behind characters and sectioned windows fragment our view of a tender family reunion behind (much like the earlier film's riverside spider web). It is certainly the case that *House* has plenty of horrible content—consider again the dismemberments in the piano scene—which it reinforces with such familiar techniques as surprise or the build-up of suspense. This is unquestionably a house of horrors. But the extremity of the film's presentation goes beyond the scariness of seeing severed body parts. The legs removed by the demonic piano float depthless in the foreground; there is a radical flatness to the image where previously there had been depth and perspective. We find ourselves staring at flares of colored light that should be ornamental yet keep getting in

Naughtiness

House. © 1977 Toho Co. Ltd. DVD: Criterion Collection.

the way of the "real" content of the film. Some of the uncanny effect of such images in *House* is perhaps consistent with the bizarre supernatural forces that are evidently at work in what passes for the film's narrative, but the visual weirdness—and the horror—goes beyond any such intelligibility. There is fright not just in the violence enacted and indulged, but also in the way what might have been just passing details have taken over the screen, enacting a carnivalesque misrule of what should not have come to the fore.

HORRIBLE FORM

The odd force of these films, and the kind of watching and reading they demand, cannot be adequately handled by the "horrible content" model of political reading. This is due, above all, to the way in which both give full play to horror's secondary aspects: details and moves associated with non-horror genres, special effects and formal techniques, affects of tenderness and sadness, filler dialogue, ornament, and landscape, to name a few. These are the aspects that are supposedly present only to augment, inflect, or temper the potential force, and political resonance, of the violence enacted on bodies, minds, and communities. When the secondary becomes primary, as it often does in *The Night of the Hunter* and *House*, we begin to see the limitations of readings mainly concerned with the allegorical significance of threats posed to, and violence inflicted upon, characters. The question then becomes, what kind of interpretation of horror films is needed in order to do justice to a powerfully unruly background?

To return to Sally's flight from Leatherface: how to read this ending not in terms of Final Girls, youth adrift, or "representatives" of that degraded proletariat but in terms of *horrible form*? One of the striking aspects of this scene is the geometric construction of the shots, which constrains and frames the motion of the characters as linear, so that they seem incapable of swerving significantly from set paths. For example, when Sally escapes, we follow her movement primarily from two perspectives. In the first, the camera is pulled back in extreme long shot from her. She becomes a figure lost in the country landscape, and her frantic approach toward the camera and the foreground is thwarted by cuts, as the camera is reset at a distance or moved off to the side where its view is partially occluded by foliage too close to be registered in focus. (Another version of this shot occurs when the camera faces backwards from the truck in which Sally escapes. As it pulls away from Leatherface, he becomes smaller and smaller, a wildly gesticulating tiny shape, clamoring for the attention that left it behind as dappled light plays on the edge of the truck.) The second recurrent perspective is one that follows the running figures on a horizontal axis, with the line of the road part way up the screen. The camera tracks alongside them or remains still as the characters scurry back and forth two-dimensionally, a desperate plight reduced briefly to a self-diminishing passage between given points. In both of these perspectives (movement through depth and movement across flat plane), there is a loss of content against the background. The life-and-death ordeal involving the protagonists becomes a distant signal obscured by wheat waving gently in the breeze.

In addition to the way content gets swallowed by the depth of the field, there is another erasure of the principal action, another blot on our vision of what has mostly demanded our attention. Just before the end of the film, the camera returns to Leatherface and his frustration at the obstacle presented to his chainsaw by the closed door of the truck. The chainsaw whirs and scrapes at it without letting up, tracing a looping scribble that replays again the way that the film's dismembering violence has suddenly been supplanted by something more abstract, a hard-to-read diagram rather than a familiar bloody denouement. And in the final shot of the film, in that moronic, wordless twirl before the setting sun, the light hits the lens and refracts, such that the surface of the frame is stained with lens flares, blinded by what comes from behind our prancing villain. His last moments of screen time are interrupted by what gets no billing, the sunset backdrop's failure to stay back. We squint reflexively at the effect, but it cannot be blinked clear.

It is certainly the case that the horrible-form kind of reading comes more easily with films such as *House* and *The Night of the Hunter*, where camera movement, effects of light, distraction, and patterning are given showy prominence, and in which the formal disruption shows itself not just in the visual field but in the narrative structure, soundtrack, setting, and adherence to generic conventions. But these films do not need to be marginalized as genre outliers or exceptions. As my reading of the ending of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is meant to show, the more extreme cases point to what too often eludes attention in less obviously strange horror movies.

Yet if we resist the who-is-threatening-whom mode of reading, letting our eyes be drawn to background patterns and flows, to aberrations of form and intrusive details, how does this constitute a *political* reading?

One of the real innovations of Marxist thought, as it developed and argued itself in the last century and half, was to move away from a model of *identification*. "The proletariat" does not just, or ever, mean "the working class." It is not a demographic category. Rather, the proletariat is a *process* of mass action and self-abolition, a collective undoing of the dominant form of value, an active negation of the relations

Vanishing point

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre. © 1974 Vortex Inc. DVD: Dark Sky Films.

that reproduce the very category of working class. It means that which can lay ruin to the abstract structure that requires the worker as structurally necessary yet which structurally excludes her. From the perspective of capital, it truly is a thing of horror: not a monster that can be pointed out ("Oh no, the working class is back!"), but the flourishing of a secondary aspect that wrecks the social relations that structure identification and exploitation. To borrow some horror discourse from Noël Carroll in *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart* (Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1990) the proletariat is a kind of monster in that it is "not now believed to exist according to reigning scientific notions" (35), a possibility of categorical revolt widely disavowed after decades of counter-revolution.

There are forms, techniques, details, and affects that threaten to throw off their role as backdrop. Does this always happen? Of course not. It is a flickering prospect that runs through the genre. The history of the horror film is also a history of flat repetition with the most minor of differences—of shark attacks that only inspire bear attacks. But when we shift away from trying to identify the subject positions, radical or otherwise, of that horrible content, we find the basis for a new kind of political reading, one sensitive above all to how films refract an economic and social order that constantly produces swelling mass of the unwanted pressing up against the edges and into the foreground. It is this horror, that of the secondary material that refuses to quit the scene or do its job, that deserves to be defended and elaborated. To move away from allegories of horrible content with their emphasis on identifying *who* might be radical is to encounter a revolutionary dimension to the political reading of horror films. What at last comes into focus is the insurrectionary prospect of the background coming monstrously into its denied prominence.

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ABSTRACT Looking back at three films (*The Night of the Hunter, House*, and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*), this essay proposes a new way to read horror politically, moving away from allegories of "horrible content" in favor of an attention to the horrors of form and how "secondary" background details assert themselves.

KEYWORDS horror films, politics and horror, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, The Night of the Hunter, House*

DVD DATA *House*. Director: Nobuhiko Obayashi. © 1977 Toho Co. Ltd. Publisher: The Criterion Collection. $29.95, 1 disc.

The Night of the Hunter. Director: Charles Laughton. © 1955 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios Inc. Publisher: The Criterion Collection. $39.95, 2 discs.

FILMS OF THE YEAR, 2010

JAMES NAREMORE MAKES HIS SELECTION OF THE YEAR'S BEST U.S. RELEASES

1. *UNCLE BOONMEE WHO CAN RECALL HIS PAST LIVES*

Thai filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul was educated at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago, where a collection of "Exquisite Corpse" drawings by the French surrealists gave him the idea for one of his early films, *Mysterious Objects at Noon* (2000). His subsequent work, consisting of museum installations as well as films, has many things in common with surrealism, including a desublimation of ordinary experience, a disregard for the coherence of realist narrative, a love of the fantastic, and an oscillation of tone between the poetic and the playful. All this is evident in *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, which tells the story of a Thai farmer dying of kidney failure (Apichatpong's father, a medical doctor, died of the same condition) and his mysterious encounter with past and future lives.

But *Uncle Boonmee* can't be explained simply as a form of surrealism or, despite Apichatpong's admiration for Gabriel García Márquez, as "magic realism." The film was inspired by a book by Phra Sripariyattiweti, a Tibetan Buddhist monk, and the finished product, though secular, retains an aura of Buddhist spirituality. *Uncle Boonmee* is also related to *The Primitive* (2009), Apichatpong's museum installation about the violent history of the Renu Nakhon district of northeast Thailand, where he was born and where the film is set. This region was occupied by the Thai army during the Vietnam War and many of its inhabitants, who were accused of being communists, were raped, tortured, and murdered. (According to Human Rights Watch, the Thai military continues a policy of political repression and "disappearances" throughout the country.) *Uncle Boonmee* therefore offers indirect political commentary alongside its haunting meditation on death, transmigration of souls, and cinema.

In stylistic terms, *Uncle Boonmee* is "slow cinema," sparing of close-ups and reverse-field editing, respectful of stillness, acted in an almost deadpan manner. Not much happens: nearing death, Boonmee (Thanapat Saisaymar) is visited by his sister-in-law Jen (Jenjira Pongpas) and her son Tong (Sakda Kaewbuadee), who live in the city. Tong nurses Boonmee, helping to drain his ailing kidney, and Boonmee shows Jen around his farm, where he raises tamarind, maize, and bees. Jen is suspicious of the illegal Chinese immigrants and "smelly" Laotians who work the farm, but as she limps around the sunny fields (her right leg is shorter than her left), she becomes friendly with one of them. At one point Boonmee tells her that his illness might be the result of bad karma: "I killed too many communists," he explains. "I killed bugs, too."

At night the world is different, populated by spirits with stories of their own. The opening of the film prepares us for these nocturnal presences. First we see an epigraph: "Facing the jungle, the hills and vales, my past lives as an animal and other beings rise up before me." Next, the silhouetted, moonlit image of a huge water buffalo, who looks toward the jungle and seems to hear something in the susurrus of insects and animals; uttering a short, painful cry, the beast breaks free of its tether and runs off through rice fields into the dense foliage. Later, when night falls over Boonmee's house, stranger things occur. During an evening meal, Boonmee's long-dead wife Huay appears at one end of the dinner table. The living characters are momentarily disconcerted, but they settle into matter-of-fact conversation with the ghostly figure, who gradually takes solid form. In the midst of their conversation, the night air is filled with a minatory, pulsing noise (the film's sound design is as impressive as its imagery), and a dark figure who looks like a B-movie actor in an ape suit, eyes glowing like E.T.'s fingertips, enters from downstairs, sits at the table, and identifies himself as Boonmee's lost, presumed-dead son. "Why did you let your hair grow so long?" Auntie Jen asks in comic amazement. "There are many beings outside," the son says to his father, "spirits and hungry animals like me. They sense your illness." He explains that as a young man he experimented with the art of photography and became fascinated by the ape-like creatures his developed pictures revealed in the trees beyond the farm. He wandered away to a forgotten

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"old world" and mated with one of the "monkey ghosts" who roam in the night.

Perhaps it should be noted that ghosts in Buddhism are different from the ones we know in the West: they can be dead spirits who visit the living, or "hungry ghosts" who occupy a liminal state between life and death. The monkey ghosts in *Uncle Boonmee* seem to belong more to the latter category, and it may be significant that both of the spirit characters appear during a meal. In any case, the family's gentle acceptance of the ghostly visitors makes them seem less uncanny than marvelous. Still later that evening, with hardly any motivation, we cut away from the farm to witness a self-contained episode from the folkloric past, perhaps from one of Boonmee's previous lives, which provides another illustration of the intercourse between spirits, animals, and humans. A Thai princess, her beautiful eyes visible above a veil, travels through the nighttime jungle in a regal litter born by her male servants. She reaches out and caresses the hair and arm of one of the handsome bearers, who looks up and secretly touches her hand. Soon she arrives at a moonlit pool beside a waterfall (the scene is shot day-for-night, its eeriness enhanced by a blue-green filter), where she removes her veil, revealing a homely, scarred face. The reflection she sees in the pool, however, is that of a lovely woman. The handsome young servant approaches and tries to make love to her, but she sends him away because she doubts his sincerity and doesn't trust the reflection. Alone, she kneels and weeps. A large catfish raises his head above the water and speaks: "Princess, don't waste your tears," he says, and begins describing her beauty in seductive tones. When he swims away, she wades into the pool, removing her jeweled necklaces, offering them as a gift for his return. Swooning, she extends her body and floats on her back, her legs spread. Suddenly she experiences a series of orgasmic jolts and spasms. The fish's giant tail flaps and splashes between her legs. Down below, under the murky water, a necklace drifts away in a cloud of bubbles and a pair of catfish swim around, their long tendrils swaying in the current.

This is one of the most arresting cinematic moments I've witnessed in years, a surreal blend of the marvelous and the erotic, merging animal with human and carnal with sublime. The remainder of the film is less vividly supernatural but no less strange. As Boonmee's death approaches, his dead wife leads his family group through the forest and into a hillside cave, where they glimpse phosphorescent rocks, pools of albino fish, and cave drawings. "This cave," Boonmee says, "it's like a womb, isn't it? I was born here, I don't know if as a woman or man." Then the film briefly becomes a sort of *photo-roman* accompanied by Boonmee's narration: "Last night I dreamed of the future, ruled by an authority able to make people disappear . . . I was afraid because I had friends in this future." We see still photos of teenage soldiers in camouflage, capturing ape-men and posing for the camera—images derived from *The Primitive*, which is more extensive in its account of Thai military repression and the disappeared or forgotten history of political violence. Back in the cave, Boonmee's wife opens the tube leading into his kidney and lets it drain onto the ground.

Boonmee's funeral is held in the city, where Jen counts up gifts of money from mourners. Tong, we discover, is a Buddhist monk, but after the funeral he wants to change out of his robes and visit a 7-Eleven convenience store or a café. (Apichatpong has previously been censored by Thai authorities for portraying monks in this lightly satirical fashion.) As he and Jen prepare to leave, one of the film's rare instances of shot/reverse-shot editing gives them pause: they look off screen and see themselves watching TV in the same spot they occupied a few moments before. The film ends in a karaoke café where they sit in silence, perhaps thinking of the temporal displacement they've experienced and remembering the old world they left behind.

NAREMORE'S FILMS OF 2010

1. *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (Apichatpong Weerasethakul)
2. *Mysteries of Lisbon* (Raoul Ruiz)
3. *Carlos* (Olivier Assayas)
4. *The Strange Case of Angelica* (Manoel de Oliveira)
5. *Everyone Else* (Maren Ade)
6. *Vincere* (Marco Bellocchio)
7. *Winter's Bone* (Debra Granik)
8. *I Am Love* (Luca Guadagnino)
9. *Sweetgrass* (Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Ilisa Barbash)
10. *Inside Job* (Charles Ferguson)

Honorable mention (alphabetical by director): *The Art of the Steal* (Don Argott), *Black Swan* (Darren Aronofsky), *Alice in Wonderland* (Tim Burton), *Poetry* (Lee Chang-dong), *The Kids Are All Right* (Lisa Cholodenko), *White Material* (Claire Denis), *The Square* (Nash Edgerton), *The Social Network* (David Fincher), *Let it Rain* (Agnès Jaoui), *Certified Copy* (Abbas Kiarostami), *Fair Game* (Doug Liman), *The Ghost Writer* (Roman Polanski), *If I Want to Whistle, I Whistle* (Florin Serban), *Hitler in Hollywood* (Frédéric Sojcher), *Toy Story 3* (Lee Unkrich), *La Danse: The Paris Opera Ballet* (Frederick Wiseman).

Strange visions

Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives. © 2010 Kick the Machine Films, Illuminations Films Past Lives, Anna Sanders Films, The Match Factory, Eddie Saeta S.A.
DVD: New Wave Films (U.K.).

Some of Apichatpong's aims in the film can be inferred from his evocative essay, "Ghosts in the Darkness" (translated in the 2009 *Apichatpong Weerasethakul* collection edited by James Quandt and published in the Austrian Film Museum's Synema series), which is both a theory of cinema and a commentary on his key images and themes. "If you notice the people around you while watching a film," Apichatpong writes, "you will see that their behavior is like that of ghosts, lifting up their heads to see the moving images . . . The moving images on the screen are camera records of events that have already taken place; they are remains of the past, strung together and called a film. In this hall of darkness, ghosts are watching ghosts." But the situation isn't as morbid as it may sound. "Just as we like to look at ghosts," Apichatpong explains, "we seem instinctively to want to enter dark halls . . . like returning to our mother's womb, fleeing there for safety, like the time during the war in Laos, when people living on the Ho Chi Minh Trail . . . were attacked by phosphorous bombs during an air raid and took refuge in a cave . . . The cave is probably still full of bones, ranging from small children to adults. If you went to see it now you might see real ghosts there—you wouldn't need a film." A more striking example from the same period, he observes, was the Quan Y cave on Cat Ba Island in Vietnam, which served not only as a hidden hospital but also as a recreation area and a cinema. "[Y]ou come to the conclusion that we watch films instinctively, as therapy for mental and emotional pain. Tens of thousands of years ago, when our ancestors were living in caves, they often drew on the walls of the cave, showing us how they lived their lives . . . Looking at it like this, you could say that cinemas, whether inside or outside department stores, are our modern day caves."

In an influential essay of 1975, "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema," French theorist Jean-Louis Baudry compared cinema to the lights flickering on the back wall of Plato's cave—an illusory shadow show from which we need to liberate ourselves. Apichatpong thinks exactly otherwise. His cinema cave is dedicated to recovering a repressed history, healing pain, and connecting our spirits with others.

2. *MYSTERIES OF LISBON*

I've never read the prolific Portuguese author Camilo Castelo Branco (1825–90), but two of his novels have been adapted by major directors—Manoel de Oliveira's *Doomed Love* (1978) and Raoul Ruiz's *Mysteries of Lisbon* (2010)—and based on this evidence it seems clear what sort of writer he was, at least in some of his work. The novels in question, dated respectively 1862 and 1854, were influenced by the romantic tradition of Chateaubriand and Hugo; they give us passionate individuals in conflict with oppressive aristocrats, clashes of tragic and grotesque emotion, swirling melodramatic action, and sympathetic portrayals of characters who are orphaned, illegitimate, or victims of the ruling patriarchy (in real life, Castelo Branco was all three). They were probably composed at great speed, because Castelo Branco was the first Portuguese writer to live entirely by his pen. He became a master of the *feuilleton* and the multi-volume novel—a talented practitioner of the nineteenth-century version of pulp fiction or soap opera.

The Oliveira and Ruiz films make an interesting comparison. Each is approximately four and a half hours long, intended to be shown as a TV miniseries. Working from a short novel, Oliveira is radically literal; instead of condensing his source by converting novelistic description into spectacle, as films normally do, he preserves virtually all of Castelo Branco's language, emphasizing telling rather than showing. The paradoxical result, as Randal Johnson has pointed out in *Manoel de Oliveira* (University of Illinois Press, 2007), is the transformation of a theatrical, emotional, melodramatic text into an austere experiment in cinematic modernism. Ruiz's approach is just the opposite, though in some ways no less modernist. His screenwriter, Carlos Saboga, has condensed a triple-decker novel into four and a half hours, somehow retaining its plot and leaving enough room for Ruiz to add embellishments of his own; HD photographer André Szankowski and art director Isabel Branco create a gorgeous, period-film spectacle filled with scenic locations; and Ruiz, who began his career in Chile making soap operas, keeps the large cast and the convoluted strands of the narrative moving at a swift pace.

In an interview publicizing the film, Ruiz has said that *Mysteries of Lisbon* has a "gliding" and "labyrinthine" form. In keeping with the first of these qualities—and with what many describe as the baroque theatricality of the novel—he employs long takes, sinuous camera movements, 360-degree pans, lateral tracking shots that slide past the walls of rooms, and complex, graceful blocking. He often frames scenes through doorways, windows, or parted curtains, sometimes using the technique to show us contrasting levels of action. (One of the most amusing sequence shots has two frames within the frame: a priest disembarks from a closed carriage, looks down the street at a violent quarrel, and gets back in the carriage; through the vehicle's near window we see him reading from a Bible as the action on the street boils past the window beyond him.) Occasionally he places a servant on one side of a doorway or behind a wall, overhearing a private conversation in

Intrigue and theatricality
Mysteries of Lisbon. Photos: misteriosdelisboa.com.

the distance. Several of his compositions are reminiscent of Welles and Toland in *Citizen Kane* (1941): wide-angle, floor-level views and deep-focus arrangements in which a giant head—at one point the head of a parrot—occupies the extreme foreground while action occurs in the far background. Now and then he experiments with antique behavior and old-fashioned theatricality: characters who faint upon hearing shocking news are framed in wide shot, flopping to the floor like rag dolls.

The labyrinthine plot defies description and contains many surprises. In somewhat Dickensian fashion, it begins when the orphan Pedro da Silva (played as a child by João Luís Arrais and as an adult by José Afonso Pimentel), with the help of a kindly priest (Adriano Luz), discovers that he's the love child of a Portuguese countess who was forced to abandon him. Soon, however, everything veers off into stories within the story, told in flashback by multiple narrators. I kept losing track of where it all started, but I was never disappointed. Pedro intermittently returns and several episodes are introduced by inserts of a small, beautifully decorated cardboard theater given to him by his mother. At the end we discover that he's been narrating everything from his death bed in Brazil. By the time we reach this point, we've also learned that nearly all the important characters have hidden identities and secrets that undermine the assumptions we initially made about them.

The major theme of the film could described as the instability of human identity, which is always constructed out of individual memories, internalized narratives, and social performances, and which, under certain conditions, is subject to fluctuation and change. The characters in *Mysteries of Lisbon* inhabit a world of immutable aristocracy and Catholic hierarchy, governed by unalterably established institutions. But that world is decadent, beginning to resemble a Gothic novel in which things aren't necessarily as they appear. (Significantly, one of the characters has been reading Ann Radcliffe, who was among the inventors of Gothic fiction.) It's a world in which outlaws become priests, mothers become nuns, and hired killers become aristocrats. The shape-shifting characters, together with the classically realist plot that goes in so many directions it seems to have no goal, make the film and the old novel on which it's based seem not only romantically fun and fascinatingly mysterious, but also very modern indeed.

3. *CARLOS*

Olivier Assayas's riveting *Carlos* was also designed as a TV miniseries, in this case photographed in 35mm widescreen and lasting five and a half hours. Although it achieved limited U.S. theatrical showings in both a long and a condensed version (perhaps because it plays into post-9/11 anxieties about terrorism), it's an unusually intelligent film about Cold War history that should be seen at full length; its natural home is cable TV, DVD, and digital streaming.

Carlos tells the story of the real-life Venezuelan terrorist-for-hire Ilich Ramirez Sánchez, aka "Carlos the Jackal," who claimed to be a soldier of international revolution and probably believed the ideas he espoused, but who was essentially an instrument of totalitarian agendas he barely understood. Carlos worked at various times for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the East German Stasi, the Romanian Securitate, and perhaps the KGB. At one point he tried to found a group called the Organization of Armed Struggle. He was responsible for the failed assassination in London of a Zionist businessman, a failed bombing in London of a bank, two failed rocket-propelled grenade attacks on El Al airplanes at Orly in Paris, and a bungled kidnapping of OPEC leaders in Vienna. He made attacks on French newspapers, the office of Radio Free Europe in Munich, and the Maison de France in West Berlin; he tossed a grenade into a Paris restaurant, killed two French special agents who tried to capture him at a party, and detonated bombs in two passenger trains. Since 1997, he has been serving a life sentence in France. His prison writings, containing praise for Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, were published under the title *Revolutionary Islam*.

In the eyes of his handlers Carlos was a loose cannon who enjoyed women and booze and was much too happy to appear on wanted posters. The PFLP fired him, the Stasi spied on him, Cuba and several Arab states refused him a home, the Syrians expelled him, and the French easily captured him in Khartoum when he lost all usefulness in the Arab region. Even so, right-wing journalists portrayed him as an evil genius and he became something of a pop-culture legend, a name that appears in formulaic stories about International Masters of Terror hunted by Intrepid Government Agents. He's a character in novels by Robert Ludlum and Tom Clancy and in over a dozen movies and TV shows. A pop-art version of his face appears on an album cover for a British rock group, Black Grape, making him resemble a second-rate Che Guevara.

Assayas's well-researched film, admittedly compounded of historical fact and imaginative speculation, grows in part out of his interest in globalization, which he treated previously in *Irma Vep* (1996), *Boarding Gate* (2007), and *Summer Hours* (2009), and in part out of his politics, which are influenced by Guy Debord's critique of the "society of the spec

Loose cannon

Carlos. © Film en Stock/Egoli/Tossell Film Carlos GmbH. DVD: Optimum Home Entertainment (U.K.).

tacle" and George Orwell's left libertarianism. (He articulately discusses these matters in an interview with Rob White, www.filmquarterly.org/2010/12/encounter-interview-with-olivier-assayas.) He nevertheless approaches the social-political themes indirectly, avoiding excessive editorializing or deep analysis of Carlos. Instead he concentrates on the character's peripatetic bombings and killings, which are depicted factually but in high-adrenaline style—jump-cutting, restlessly reframing, sampling anachronistic post-punk music, leaping to multiple locations across Europe and the Middle East as Carlos rises to rock-star fame and simultaneously becomes a problem for his employers.

The staging of Carlos's exploits, particularly the raid on OPEC, is swift, spectacular, and frightening, but it also has moments of black comedy, as when Carlos's henchmen fire rockets at an airliner on a runway directly in front of them and hit planes at the far end of the airport, or when Gabriele Kröchner-Tiedemann, scarily played by Julia Hummer, throws a tantrum because she can't kill hostages. For all his daring and revolutionary zeal, Carlos himself is portrayed as an alcoholic abuser of women and a lover of fine clothes and bourgeois amenities. He's also a narcissist who craves celebrity and is turned on by violence. After his first try at bomb-throwing, we see him emerging from a bubble bath, admiring his body in a mirror, and beginning to masturbate as he stands in a window. Later, he boasts that "weapons are an extension of my body" and seduces a woman by having her suck on the pin of a hand grenade.

What keeps the character from seeming little more than a shallow, self-regarding killer is the charisma of Venezuelan actor Édgar Ramirez, who is far more handsome than the real Carlos and brings movie-star glamour to the role, at the same time transforming himself, De Niro-style, from a muscular young proponent of revolution to a bloated drunk with a testicular ailment. The film has many striking performers (especially Nora von Waldstätten as Magdalena Kopp, Carlos's German wife), but it wouldn't work without Ramirez. He speaks several of the eleven languages we hear, repeatedly changes his appearance in keeping with Carlos's love of disguise and costume, and throughout projects a combination of machismo and Brando-like sexual aura. He's so effective that some reviewers have criticized Assayas for glamorizing terrorism. Actually, the film's values are made explicit by the minor characters of the left that disassociate themselves from Carlos. The eponymous "hero" is a creature of the media who has no moral qualms about killing and a dim awareness of history. He does know, however, that he has strong nerves and fighting instincts, and that he looks good in sunglasses and a beret.

4. *THE STRANGE CASE OF ANGELICA*

The 101-year old Manoel de Oliveira's first film, "Labor on the Douro" (1931) is a twenty-one-minute documentary about working life on and around Portugal's Douro River as it flows from wine-making country to the ports of Lisbon. A fusion of Expressionism, Impressionism, and city-symphony montage, it opens with images of traditional agricultural labor and shifts to mechanical labor as we enter the metropolis, where accelerated cutting suggests the bustling pace of modernity. Oliveira's latest film, *The Strange Case of Angelica*, is the antithesis or bookend of the first. Feature-length fiction, it starts in roughly the same place but lingers in a town beside the river where work in the fields is being replaced by machines. It rejects speed in favor of an exceedingly slow and contemplative pace, keyed to the music of laboring songs and the delicate yearning of a Chopin piano solo.

The Strange Case of Angelica is imbued with a love of Portuguese literary culture and a melancholy spirit of romantic transcendence, which it occasionally treats with a wry humor. Its epigraph, from the late nineteenth-century Portuguese poet Antero de Quental, describes the death of a funeral flower, the "lily of celestial valleys," whose end will create a love "never to perish." The story opens on a rainy night, when Isaac, a young Jewish photographer (played by Oliveira's grandson, Ricardo Trêpa), is urgently called upon to take funerary pictures of the daughter of an important local family. Just before the call arrives, we find him alone in his boarding-house room, chain-smoking and working on a photographic negative at a desk piled with books. Among the volumes is a 1934 fictionalized biography of Saint Paul by Teixeira de Pascoaes, the poet most associated with the deeply Portuguese concept of "*saudade*," which Pascoaes defined as "the action of desire on remembrance and of remembrance on desire." Another is *The Crossroads of God* (1936) by poet José Régio, from which Isaac reads aloud: "Time, stand still, / and you former beings / who roam fantastical, celestial ways, / Angels, open the gates of heaven, / for in my night is day / and in me is God."

As a Jew, Isaac is a stranger to the community, but he's fascinated by Portugal's religion, dying agricultural traditions, and quasi-mystical, late-romantic literature. (*The Strange Case of Angelica* grew out of a film Oliveira wanted to make in the 1950s, dealing with Jews who migrated to Portugal after World War II.) Summoned to take pictures of the dead young woman, he seems in awe of the family's dark mansion, the mourners sitting like statuary around the walls, and the deceased's sister, a nun, who looks at him suspiciously. The sight of Angelica, the dead woman (Pilar López de Ayala), strikes him dumb. A beautiful blonde with long hair, full lips, and

Desire and remembrance
The Strange Case of Angelica. Courtesy of The Cinema Guild.

a peacefully smiling expression, she wears a white wedding dress (she was newly married and pregnant) and reclines on a blue "fainting couch" as if she were merely sleeping. When Isaac looks through the camera lens to photograph her, she opens her eyes and smiles at him. Back in his room, when he looks at the developed photos of her he has hung out to dry, she opens her eyes and smiles again.

Isaac becomes obsessed with the angelic dead woman, and also with the old-style laboring men he photographs in a vineyard on the banks of the Douro—a location he can see from the window of his room. He attends Angelica's funeral and lingers in agony outside the cemetery where she's buried. One evening he awakes from sleep to find her ghost standing on his balcony. They embrace and she takes him on an ecstatic, moonlit flight above the Douro, during which he finds a white lily floating in the water. (The flying sequence—chaste and idealized but resembling a newly married couple in their nuptial bed—is accomplished with digital technology but has the magical, quaintly amusing power of early cinema and puts Hollywood CGI to shame.) When he falls back to earth, he wonders aloud if the flight was a dream, ponders the momentary celestial love that relieved him of "anguish," and becomes desperate to find Angelica again. On the next morning at breakfast, his landlady and three other boarders gossip about his strange behavior in recent days. (One of the group, a woman engineer from Brazil, is played by Ana Maria Magalhães, who was a beautiful and quite naked Tupinambá in Nelson Pereira dos Santos's *How Tasty was my Little Frenchman*, 1972.) A vase at the middle of the breakfast table holds a white lily exactly like the one Isaac found in the Douro. When he enters the room, the group around the table changes the topic of conversation to current events, including Portugal's economic crisis and the effects of global warming. Isaac can only stand in stupefied preoccupation, drinking coffee and staring out the window at the river.

Oliveira has described himself as a "cerebral" filmmaker, in part because of his interest in literature and ideas, and in part because of his slow, emotionally detached style: he typically stages scenes in long takes with little or no camera movement, and his actors are posed as if in a proscenium theater, displaying none of the psychological "realism" we've come to expect of movies. *The Strange Case of Angelica* has these traits, but is nevertheless a whimsical, lovely, and emotionally touching film, beautifully photographed by Sabine Lancelin and graced by charming, mysterious details at the edges of the screen—a goldfish swimming in a bowl in an empty room, or a kitten, fascinated by a caged bird, who becomes distracted by the sound of a dog barking outside a window. For anyone familiar with Oliveira's work, it's difficult not to see the film as a personal and deeply felt project. Isaac functions to some degree as a surrogate for the film's author. He's a man with a camera who preserves memories and captures images that hark back to the spiritualism of early photography. He feels *saudade*, soulful attachment to the Portuguese vineyards, and mystical longing for an eternal *élan vital*. At the end of the film he dies, but in doing so he resembles Pascoaes, one of the poets in his library, who once wrote, "I was born to live beyond life."

5. *EVERYONE ELSE*

Gitti (Birgit Minichmayr) and Chris (Lars Eidinger) are attractive, sexy young lovers from Germany enjoying a holiday alone in Sardinia at a summer house owned by Chris's parents. They wander half-dressed in the golden sun, briefly babysit two children belonging to Chris's sister, and play childlike sexual games: Chris makes a toy animal out of a piece of ginger and pulls it out of his fly like a penis; Gitti

On vacation

Everyone Else. © 2009 Komplizen Film Produktion/SWR/WDR/ARTE. DVD: Cinema Guild.

paints Chris's face with lipstick and eyeliner, and when he worries if he's masculine enough she tells him, "Do something masculine and I'll see if I recognize it."

This is the Edenic opening of Maren Ade's *Everyone Else*, a sensitive, complex film about social and psychological threats to a loving sexual relationship. The tomboyish Gitti is spirited, earthy, and generous, but a bit too intense. Near the beginning of the film, trying to deal with Chris's recalcitrant little niece, she acts as if she's been shot and falls "dead" into the family swimming pool, where she floats face down for a disturbing length of time. The rather pretty Chris is gentle but *triste* and overly self-conscious about his mother's upstairs room in the summer house, which contains a glass menagerie and an old collection of sentimental pop music. It soon emerges that he's an architect who fears he might not succeed. Gitti gives him emotional support, but when he loses an important competition he sulks and points out that when she watches Italian TV she doesn't understand the language.

Later the couple accidentally encounters one of Chris's architect friends, Hans (Hans-Jochen Wagner) and his pregnant wife Sana (Nicole Marischka), who invite them to dinner. During the evening Gitti becomes hostile, accusing Hans of treating Chris condescendingly. The next day Chris becomes cold and cruel. His mood changes when he gets a commission to rebuild a house, but things fall apart again when he and Gitti invite Hans and Sana to dinner and try to make up for the first meeting. Hans makes a pass at Gitti, who privately threatens Sana with a kitchen knife, ordering her to take her husband and leave. After the party, Chris broods in an outdoor garden and Gitti suddenly flings herself from the window of his mother's second-story room, barely missing sharp rocks on the ground and lying face down for a long while, as she did earlier in the pool. She sits up just before Chris discovers her, and the emotionally exhausted couple has sex there on the grass. On the following morning, however, Gitti contemptuously announces to Chris that she no longer loves him. As she prepares to return to Germany, he breaks into tears. At first she ignores his pain, but then she falls to the floor and plays dead for the third time. Chris sits in torment beside her for what seem like hours, until he finally "revives" her with a sad, childish joke and the film ends.

A few reasons why Chris and Gitti's relationship is troubled are apparent in this summary, but *Everyone Else* is so subtly written and directed by Ade and acted by Minichmayr and Eidinger (both of whom are respected theater actors in Berlin) that many reviewers seem not to have grasped one of the unstated problems between the lovers: they belong to different social classes. Chris comes from a wealthy family and

aspires to become a famous architect, whereas Gitti works as a publicist for a record label, looking after a band called The Shames, which Chris finds amusing. When they make love, he tenderly recalls that she was the sexiest girl in the disco where they first met, but when they encounter people of his own class, he's a little ashamed of her. At one point she buys a dress to please him, but it isn't pretty and makes her feel "bourgeois." (Sana is a famous dress designer whose clothes Gitti can't afford.) When she goes alone into town and allows a department-store saleswoman to apply makeup to her face, she's seized with anger and inadequacy and stands in the street wiping it off. Notice also that the affluent architect Hans and his wife aren't the only representatives of "everyone else." Midway through the film, Gitti tells Chris that another German couple, the Petersens (Mira Partecke and Atef Vogel), have invited them on a motor-boat trip. His only response is to ask, "What do they do," and mock what he calls "authentic" people. When he and Gitti accidentally encounter the Petersens in town, we discover that Gitti's acquaintances are a warmly friendly, working-class couple. They don't mind that Gitti and Chris never showed up for the boat ride, and they extend the invitation again. Chris says he can't accept—his time in Sardinia is short, he explains, and he's busy with a job. The next night he and Gitti have their second dinner with Hans and Sana.

Described in this fashion, Chris sounds like a swine. I can only say that the film is never overstated and gives us a fairly equable treatment of the central characters. Gitti's "play dead" scenes, for example, can be read as acts of revenge, cries for help, and dangerous symptoms. She and Chris are sweetly passionate but destructively codependent; alone together, regressing to a kind of childhood, they're equally happy, and when the world at large impinges they're equally exasperating. They softly kiss at the end of the film, but their future is by no means clear.

6. *VINCERE*

Marco Bellocchio's *Vincere*, which derives its title from an anthem of the Italian Fascist party, is at once an extravagant melodrama about Benito Mussolini's suppressed marriage to Ida Dalser and a powerful visualization of the links between Fascism and Italian modernity. Mussolini is seen largely through Dalser's eyes, first as a young socialist who defies God and threatens to strangle Victor Emmanuel III with the guts from the Pope's belly, then as a bigamist and Fascist who, in order not to offend Catholics, conceals his marriage to Dalser and sends her and his son to insane asylums. When she first meets him, Dalser is thrilled by Mussolini's revolutionary ardor and set aflame by his phallic intensity. Even after he splits from the Socialist Party and confesses his Nietzschean ambitions, she kneels to tie his shoes and sells her stylish beauty parlor and dress shop in Milan in order to finance his Fascist newspaper, *Il Popolo d'Italia*. When he takes up with another woman and abandons her, she's furious; but she's also enamored of his image in newsreels, where he seems to have become a "giant."

The film captures the eerie fascination of Fascism both as sadomasochism and in relation to Futurist or modern art, and it does so by strategically abandoning the realist style of most movies about history. Mussolini is played by Filippo Timi, who looks nothing like Il Duce but represents Dalser's vision of the man. Tall, dark, and muscular, his basic presentation of self is to scowl and gaze ahead like a bull or a conqueror; he smiles only in the dark of a movie theater, where he and his uniformed bullies try to stir up patriotic frenzy for Italy's entry into World War I. When he lies naked atop Dalser, played by Giovanna Mezzogiorno, he rolls his eyeballs weirdly back into his head until only the whites are visible, thrusting into her as if she were the feminine body of the masses. As the sexual plot develops, *Vincere* takes on wider implications through the use of archival film footage, animation, intertitles, and antique special effects that link Mussolini with the advent of twentieth-century modernity. His sword duel with a political rival is staged against an expressionist background of billowing factory smokestacks, and the numerous film clips emphasize industry and mechanical speed. After Mussolini establishes his Fascist party, we see him at an exhibit of Marinetti's school of futurist painters, who were responsible for a cult of modernity and war.

Bellocchio appropriates material not only from newsreels, but also from Futurist cinema and a variety of silent features (including an Italian re-edit of Eisenstein's 1928 *October*), using it for exposition but also showing the characters watching movies. When Mussolini lies wounded in a World War I hospital where he's paid a ceremonial visit by a midget Victor Emmanuel, he views a silent film adaptation of a Passion play projected on the ceiling, and identifies with Christ; when Dalser and her son are abandoned and alone, she tearfully watches Chaplin's *The Kid* (1921). Eventually, Mussolini *becomes* cinema—a leader of the masses who projects his power through a mass medium. Once he achieves dictatorship, we see him only in newsreel footage, as a bald, iron-jawed figure aping the Roman emperors. The most astonishing moment comes when Bellocchio shows a clip from a sound newsreel of a triumphant Il Duce orating from a balcony—a chubby bantam cock, absurdly decorated with feathers and medals, gesticulating wildly and predicting a

Mussolini spectacle

Vincere. © Rai Cinema/Offside/Celluloid Dreams. DVD: Artificial Eye (U.K.).

new Roman empire. Afterwards, his abandoned son, Benito Albino (now grown but still played by Timi), who, like his mother, has been driven insane, loudly repeats the filmed oration word for word. It's a disturbing symptom of the son's furious resentment and desire to claim his patrimony. He's a madman imitating a madman.

7. *WINTER'S BONE*

In an interview appended to the 2010 movie tie-in edition of *Winter's Bone*, novelist Daniel Woodrell describes himself as a "regionalist" who is indebted to Southern literary traditions. His best work is set in an area of the Ozarks on the borderland between Missouri and Arkansas, where his family has lived for many generations; and as an artist he has a certain things in common with William Faulkner—a pitch-perfect ear for regional vernacular, a love of Biblical language, and a taste for the American gothic. He says that his favorite writers are Flannery O'Connor and James Agee, and his favorite filmmakers Robert Bresson and the Dardenne brothers. Not surprisingly, he has an interest in the grotesque and a respectful, almost reverent sympathy for the marginalized and dispossessed. But Woodrell is also a crime novelist whose books are short and well plotted. One of them, the darkly comic *Give Us a Kiss*, is subtitled *A Country Noir*, a term Woodrell invented but now repudiates on the grounds that noir has become an empty signifier. Even so, *Winter's Bone* has structural connections to classic private-eye fiction.

Debra Granik's film adaptation does an admirable job of giving us the plot and feel of the novel, minus some if its distinctive language and frozen winter chill. Shot in the picturesque but hardscrabble area where the novel takes place, the film avoids studio sets and uses a good many local actors and musicians. Its heroine, the seventeen-year-old Ree Dolly, very convincingly played by Jennifer Lawrence, is the sole caretaker of a family whose father has skipped bail and disappeared on a charge of cooking and selling methamphetamine. Ree prepares the family's paltry meals, washes her catatonic mother's hair, and teaches her two young siblings how to read and how to shoot and skin squirrels. She also becomes a kind of detective, trying to locate her father before the police can seize the family home. In this latter role she travels through territory more menacing than Chandler's mean streets, where she encounters an array of characters scarier than the usual pulp-fiction thugs and suffers as tough a beating as ever happened to Philip Marlowe.

Like all the best hard-boiled stories, the investigative plot results in a kind of map or anatomy of a society. Many of the people in Ree's world live beyond the law, in backwoods

Trouble in the Ozarks

Winter's Bone. © 2010 Winter's Bone Productions LLC. DVD: Artificial Eye (U.K.).

clans. The men are wife-beaters and addicts, and the women marry too young and shoulder too much responsibility. And yet there's a nearby school, nicely documented by the film, and we glimpse a sociable folk gathering. For all its outlaw quality, the culture is capable of forging strong family bonds and creating a young woman like Ree, who is proud, courageous, and intelligent. In a larger view, however, Ree resembles a figure in ancient tragedy, living in a primal world where family is destiny. One of the most affecting scenes in the film comes when, desperately trying to find money, she naively goes to an Army recruiting office. Even if she were old enough and really wanted to join up and travel, she couldn't. Her loyalty, strength, and resourcefulness keep her tied to her home, but they also trap her there.

8. *I AM LOVE*

If you haven't seen this film, it may sound familiar. It's the one about a rich man's wife who is sexually awakened by a worker on her estate, and another in the endless parade of movies about sex and food. Nevertheless, Tilda Swinton and director Luca Guadagnino, who are also among the film's producers, have made something special of it. Swinton plays Emma Recchi, a Russian trophy wife who marries into a high-bourgeois family of textile-factory owners in Milan and bears three children. Completely assimilated, she's a loving mother, a sophisticated manager of an enormous household staff, and a beautifully dressed ornament to her husband; but she has an air of shy submissiveness and seems fully at ease only with her grown children and personal housemaid. Her son's friendship with an aspiring young chef liberates a repressed memory of her youth in Russia, and she embarks on an affair with the chef. The film climaxes with a *coup de théâtre* and a breathtaking escape from the Recchi family. Its story has begun in a mansion, and, a bit like *Uncle Boonmee*, it ends in a cave.

I was captivated by the graphic design of the credits, the opening shots of snow covering Milan, and the extraordinarily beautiful modernist architecture of the Recchi home. (In reality, this building now serves as a museum.) Guadagnino and his production designers make the warm, tastefully decorated spaces inside the mansion seem extremely desirable, but a dinner party for the family patriarch feels almost like an aristocratic *Godfather*, in the style of Luchino Visconti. One of the most exciting moments is Emma's visit to San Remo, which deliberately evokes *Vertigo*, but with the roles reversed so that a woman stalks a man. John Adams's music in the sequence is reminiscent of Bernard Herrmann, Swinton's hair has the same French twist as Kim Novak's, and the

Alluding to *Vertigo*
I Am Love. © 2009 First Sun/Mikado Film. DVD: Metrodome (U.K.).

winding movement through town is very skillfully shot and edited, generating suspense and ending with a surprise. Of the many times *Vertigo* has been alluded to in movies, this for me is among the most novel and emotionally effective. It alone would make *I Am Love* worth seeing, though the film as a whole offers many cinematic pleasures.

9. *SWEETGRASS*

Lucien Castaing-Taylor's and Ilisa Barbash's nonfiction film about a family-owned sheep ranch in Big Timber, Sweet Grass County, Montana, is a triumph of the "direct," "observational," or "anthropological" form associated with the Maysles brothers, Fredrick Wiseman, and Jean Rouch. This kind of cinema was heavily criticized by 1970s theorists (who also attacked Hollywood's "classic realism") and has been shouldered aside in the age of Michael Moore and TV "reality" shows. *Sweetgrass* helps to remind us what we've been missing. It records the harsh process of sheep-shearing and the painful work of lambing on the Allestad ranch, and then follows a huge drive of sheep into mountainous grazing territory on leased public land. In wide shots, the packed, moving herd resembles a snowy ocean, but in closer views we see individual sheep as they struggle through forests and ford a stream reminiscent of the cattle drive in *Red River* (1948). Once we arrive at the border of public land, the entire job of managing the two thousand sheep is left in the hands of two men—John Ahern, a weathered sheepherder who smokes hand-rolled cigarettes and talks more to animals than to humans, and Ahern's cousin, Pat Connolly, a cook and guardian of the camping tent, who vents his growing frustration and fatigue with a stream of obscenities. These two not only drive the sheep up and down mountains but also protect them at night against predatory bears. They get little sleep and are on the move for a period of several months.

The film is without narration or music (except when Ahern, like an old-time cowboy, sings to the sheep), and is composed mostly in long takes, showing a skilled, back-breaking work that hasn't changed much since the early cowboy days of the nineteenth century. The camera keeps a discreet distance as Connolly washes utensils after a meal, Ahern saddles his horse, and both men sit quietly in the tent during a moment of peace. Everywhere the scenery is majestic—it's difficult to point a widescreen color camera in this part of Montana without seeing something beautiful—but the film generally avoids the picturesque and views landscape in relation to labor and the production of a commodity. In one of the most memorable scenes, a 360-degree pan circles the mountain range while Connolly talks on a cell phone to his mother, bitterly complaining that he, his horse, and his sheepdog are at the point of collapse. "It's going to hurt if I keep this shit up," he says. "I'd rather enjoy these mountains rather than hate them and it's getting to that point. I'm just hatin' it."

End of an era

Sweetgrass. Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Castaing-Taylor. DVD: Cinema Guild.

Sweetgrass also has an elegiac effect. Part of the drive back down the mountains is photographed late in the day with the sun casting light through trees, and when the river of sheep reaches a railroad crossing at the edge of town, the sense of relief is tempered by regret that something is over. The owner of the farm drives Ahern home and asks him what he plans for the future, because the ranch will be closing. Ahern gazes ahead for a long while and says he just wants to rest and then maybe raise a few sheep. The screen goes dark and a title card informs us that "In 2003, over three months and 150 miles, the last band of sheep moved through Montana's Absaroka-Beartooth mountains." A very old tradition of work with animals in this area has come to an end.

10. *INSIDE JOB*

My list ends with a more conventional kind of documentary. Charles Ferguson's *Inside Job*, a talking-heads investigation into the Wall Street players responsible for the twenty-first century's worldwide economic collapse, is a calm and informative look into a government-enabled disaster. The causes of the economic meltdown can be traced back to Reagan-era deregulation and greed but, as Ferguson shows, there's plenty of blame to go around. No administration after Reagan has done anything to stem the tide of sociopathic behavior in the higher reaches of the banking and financial system—even Obama, who had the best opportunity to restore New Deal protections

Heist movie

Inside Job. Photos: Representational Pictures. Courtesy of Sony Pictures Classics.

and oust the chief miscreants, has put some of the foxes back in charge of the henhouse and achieved only modest regulatory improvements. If the forces of reaction now gathering have their way, the disaster will repeat itself and the gulf between the rich and everyone else will just keep getting bigger.

Ferguson uses well-edited archival material and explanatory graphics to help viewers understand economic complexities, but the major strength of his film lies in his interviews with lawyers, economists, and members of the financial services industry. He's often better informed than they are, and his offscreen questioning catches the worst of them in lies and evasions. He also interviews a psychologist who tries to explain the machismo and bottomless greed of a certain class of big shots, and a "Wall Street madam" who provided them with call girls. I'm not sure the psychological speculation is necessary, and I suspect it would be far more difficult to bring such characters to justice than Ferguson imagines. Nevertheless the film makes a persuasive argument that a number of very powerful individuals in the U.S. should be prosecuted and probably imprisoned alongside Enron's Kenneth Lay and Jeffrey Skilling.

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ABSTRACT This article presents reviews of the author's selection of the best films released in the U.S. in 2010: *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives; Mysteries of Lisbon; Carlos; The Strange Case of Angelica; Everyone Else; Vincere; Winter's Bone; I Am Love; Sweetgrass; Inside Job.*

KEYWORDS Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Raoul Ruiz, Olivier Assayas, Manoel de Oliveira, Maren Ade

LEARNING ABOUT TIME: AN INTERVIEW WITH APICHATPONG WEERASETHAKUL

JI-HOON KIM TALKS TO THE PRIZEWINNING THAI FILMMAKER ABOUT HIS CINEMATIC AND GALLERY WORK

Apichatpong Weerasethakul is border-crossing, maverick director whose work eludes simple classification. His feature films *Blissfully Yours* (2002), *Tropical Malady* (2004), and *Syndromes and a Century* (2006) were enthusiastically welcomed on the international film-festival circuit and have a strong cinephile following. Apichatpong's prodigious and multifaceted output also includes lesser-known shorts as well as both single- and multichannel video installations. Therefore his work can usefully be related to that of two different groups of practitioners—installation artists such as Pierre Huyghe, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Fiona Tan, and Philippe Parreno, who deliberately meld documentary and fiction, on the one hand; and filmmakers such as Chantal Akerman, Harun Farocki, Atom Egoyan, and Abbas Kiarostami, who have created gallery or installation versions of their cinematic works, on the other.

Apichatpong's films make apparent the degree to which cinema and video art are fruitfully and dynamically interconnected at the moment. His 35mm feature, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010), winner of the Palme d'Or at the 2010 Cannes Film festival, has a companion installation, *The Primitive* (2009), which consists of seven short, intersecting video pieces made while Apichatpong was preparing to shoot *Uncle Boonmee*. In the course of developing this feature about a dying Thai villager who encounters apparitions of his wife and son and is guided to see his past lives, the director visited Nabua, a small village in northeast Thailand. He became interested in its social and political history, sensing how Nabua is full of repressed memories of a conflict between the Thai military and farmers accused of sympathizing with communists in the 1960s and 70s. *The Primitive* investigates this history, focusing on a group of male teenagers descended from the communist farmers. In front of Apichatpong's camera, these youths reenact the roles of soldiers as a way of reviving their forgotten past. They also construct a kind of spaceship—a symbol of, or vehicle for, their unknown future. *The Primitive* shares elements with *Uncle Boonmee*: archival photographs of soldiers, Boonmee's haunted house. But there are also significant differences, notably the fact that the camera is usually static in *Uncle Boonmee*, whereas it is mobile in one of the installation videos, *A Letter to Uncle Boonmee*.

I met Apichatpong Weerasethakul twice in fall 2010, first during his visit to the New York Film festival in September, and then when he conducted a master class for the film program at Columbia University in November. Our discussions centered on the links between *The Primitive* and *Uncle Boonmee*.

Ji-hoon Kim: When you're working for a gallery or cinema do you feel that you're a different artist, or working for different audiences? How does it impact on what you're making and how you make it?

Apichatpong Weerasethakul: The art video has a lot to do directly with emotional responses that the audience may feel. So it's more immediate. It can give the audience the whole sensual experience of space and time. In film, it's more of a gradual accumulation of feelings. So creating video installation and making film are like different animals. But they help with each other. Sometimes when I make film, I benefit from the practices of installation art in a way that it creates an effect that is not normally film-like but more installation-like. So I think I'm still in the middle of experimenting with these two media, or two settings, and with how I combine them in order to make something else.

It seems to me that both forms affect each other while being different from each other in terms of your process of conception.

You're right. I have written proposals for my installation pieces, which were submitted to art galleries and the organizations for exhibition event, and it is sometimes of great help for me to explain to the galleries and organizations my concept and memory, including the memory of places where I lived or visited. Thus writing a proposal is integral to my

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The Primitive
Installation documentation courtesy of Kick the Machine Films.

working process. It is written in different language than film-production language, including the budget from different collaborators. But I also feel that writing a film script for a feature film is similar to writing a proposal. For instance, the script for *Uncle Boonmee* includes my statement, synopsis, treatment, actors, information on the creative team, and related projects, like my proposals for installation works. But the difference is that the script is more fully organized. In any case, my writing process is similar. I have a notebook, put down a lot of my thinking, and then try to make sense of my memos. It sometimes takes long time. For *Uncle Boonmee*, I did meditation, which was really helpful.

After watching *Uncle Boonmee*, I thought that you're relying on the visual beauty that only 35mm film can convey—as also when you portray the Thai jungle landscape in *Tropical Malady* (2004) and in the first half of *A Syndrome and A Century* (2006). However, you have also used digital video in many of your short pieces, for example *Worldly Desires* (2005). How do you see the differences between film and video in terms of the medium you are dealing with?

I tested a Sony Viper camera in *Syndromes and a Century* and discarded it when I realized that it couldn't beat 35mm film. I've always been conscious of the differences between the two mediums. It's obvious that they are physically different. You can tell right away that their images have different look, color, and depth. I feel I'm more comfortable with operating a 35mm camera: you have this grain, and you have this depth when you focus on something. Digital still cannot match these things. Film is a medium that portrays a rich visual world associated with its material qualities. Film also relates to how I deal with memory in my work. When you remember something, it's always like it has this filmic quality. When you watch video you're much more conscious of the fact that it's a medium. At least I am. But with film, that doesn't happen to me; it's natural like seeing with naked eyes. With film, which is chemical, you can obtain a wide range of visual expressions of changes in the natural world—the transition from day to night, from brightness to darkness, or a passage from soft-focused to deep-focused imagery. In this sense, I would say that film is a more "organic" medium than video, more related to human perception of nature. On the other hand, video is better than film at capturing figures and landscapes immediately and spontaneously. So it's like a palette for experimenting with different styles, for sketching preliminary ideas on a feature film, and for making installation pieces.

What is the relationship between *The Primitive* and *Uncle Boonmee*?

The feature film and the installation share the same core, which is the memory of the place, Nabua, or, to put it differently, the tribute to certain things that are disappearing in the place even though they exist separately. So both films share the same landscape and village background. But it's also like

a different viewpoint, different angles on the same object and subject. The feature film and the installation are different in terms of the way in which each deals with the memory of the village. For *The Primitive*, I approached the political memory of Nabua more directly. But for *Uncle Boonmee*, I dealt with the village more allegorically and metaphorically, mixing it with my personal memory. And in terms of form, the installation is nonlinear and nonchronological. Each work comprising the installation has its own theme, style, and running time, and the viewer can relate one video to another without any predetermined direction. There is not such an active engagement with the feature film.

To me, the correspondence between your installations and feature films is also grounded in your collaboration with the Paris production company, Anna Sanders Films, and its associates. The collaboration with teenagers in *The Primitive*, the exposure of filmmaking processes (camera, lighting, smoke machine), your exploration of Nabua as a historical place, and your uses of multiple media (books, drawings, photographs) all remind me of Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster and Pierre Huyghe, who worked with Anna Sanders Films to produce a number of films and video installations. Tell me about this influence and how it relates to the crossover between art and film.

The artists working with Anna Sanders Films approached film so freely and illogically that I felt, "That's life." When you talk about cinema, it's often all about the logic of narrative. The question is, "What is your film *about*?" In the art world, this kind of question is irrelevant. The question is more about the artist, the person who presents and is behind the work, and the emotions being communicated. The artists such as Dominique and Pierre are masters of communication in the way that they share a certain emotion with the audience without necessarily telling what it is about. This was so special to me.

Tell me about the processes of making *The Primitive* in collaboration with the teenagers. How did you come up with the idea of making the spaceship? Do you feel that the teenagers came to know about the repressed or forgotten history of their native land?

I could have gone to the older generation who experienced the hardship and brutality firsthand. But I felt that I didn't have a similar background as theirs. I don't speak the same language in terms of the media and how people live. By contrast, I was very comfortable with these young people, the way that they dress and speak. Because of that, I decided to work with them. Before the project, the teenagers already knew the history of killing, rape, and other violence in the land where they grew up. But I didn't want to talk about it directly in *The Primitive*. I mean I didn't want to explicitly film the hardship. It was more like we did activities together, playing a kind of game, knowing that this land has this history, and I think that was really enough.

The teenagers provided me with the future of the place. When I went there, it was very much like a performance: you don't know what to do. You just go there and work with them to create dreams. In dreams you can't take control. So it's like a collaborative dream-making. In political times, people don't feel they belong to the country and that's a sense of wanting to get away from the hardship or political chaos. In this situation, my interest in elements of science fiction came back to me and we decided to make a spaceship—a vehicle that could take us to the distant past and to the future . . . like cinema. Cinema has from the beginning been a kind of transportation to another world. My love of science-fiction films is also evident in some of my previous work, for example the installation *Faith* (2006). The spaceship in *The Primitive* is the place where memory is transformed and reborn (as Uncle Boonmee experiences transformation and reincarnation too). So it acts on many levels: dream, transportation, and simple protection.

Do you have a different concept of the jungle space in *Uncle Boonmee* than the jungle in *Tropical Malady*? The jungle in *Uncle Boonmee* looks more staged and artificial. It seems to me that the jungle is the place specially allowed for Boonmee's return to the origin of his memories. But the jungle in *Tropical Malady* is a more primitive environment, in which there is no clear distinction between humans and animals.

Yes, absolutely. The jungle in *Tropical Malady* is a small jungle that's real and dark. But the jungle in *Uncle Boonmee* is an artificial jungle. It's a kind of cinematic jungle. The way that we shot it is day-for-night and the color and setting of the jungle is not real. It's the staging for Uncle Boonmee's last phase before his departure to the otherworldly. I wanted to throw the actors into old films, into a landscape that does not exist in reality. I'm not sure whether my rendering of the jungle that way came from Thai films or other films, but it's something that I grew up with, perhaps classical color films, where blue was used to signify the color of the moon, and red to signify that of the day.

***Uncle Boonmee* has a relatively straightforward narrative structure, but includes multiple times associated with the past lives that Boonmee recalls, which are represented in different filmmaking styles. Why did you take this approach to the film's storyline?**

The film's narrative is a mixture of different memories and imaginations. I combined the stories of the book of the same title (written by a monk whom I met) with memories of when I grew up, including Thai legends and myths about monsters and ghosts that I heard, 1970s Thai television mystery series stories I watched, comic books I read. I also wanted my film to evoke the Thai cinema of the past, like its fourth reel, with the princess and the catfish. It totally comes out of my imagination but I referred to the style of Thai costume drama.

Top two: *Tropical Malady*. © 2004 Anna Sanders Films/Kick the Machine. DVD: Second Run (U.K.). Others: *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*. © 2010 Kick the Machine Films, Illuminations Films Past Lives, Anna Sanders Films, The Match Factory, Eddie Saeta S.A. DVD: New Wave Films (U.K.).

Ghost talk

Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives. © 2010 Kick the Machine Films, Illuminations Films Past Lives, Anna Sanders Films, The Match Factory, Eddie Saeta S.A. DVD: New Wave Films (U.K.).

I took a different approach to each of the six reels. The first reel, for example, follows my usual way of long-take filmmaking. The second reel, with the scene of the dinner with ghosts, is like old-fashioned cinema shot with a static camera, with an element also of Thai TV drama. Overall, the film is a tribute to all the cinemas I grew up with, whether Thai films, soap operas, or very classical horror movies. It was like, "OK, we're employing not a single film style, but using six different film styles."

Some critics have interpreted *The Primitive* and *Uncle Boonmee* in terms of Thai politics and history, even though the two works are clearly different in approach—the political context clearly being more explicit in *The Primitive*. How do you feel about those critics' responses? How do you define what is political in film, or what you think about political cinema?

The political in my work is something that is hidden, but you slowly become aware of what happened historically in the particular place. For me, that's a strong way to send a message. If all I wanted was to raise awareness of the history of a place, I could have written a book about it. It would be more direct. When you undertake artistic activities you give importance to the people who survive, or who really bear the history on their shoulders. This fact is already political, and an artist cannot avoid it.

What about your interest in reincarnation and your thoughts on Buddhism and quantum physics, which many critics find interesting? What do you think about this interest? Does your filmmaking involve a kind of self-meditation or self-awareness?

Film is able to increase the self-awareness of the audience—to become aware of the other people sitting in the dark, to see the activities on the screen as illusion, and to realize that this is an animal behavior. But for me as a filmmaker, it's less about self-awareness than about getting to learn about time. In *Uncle Boonmee*, I came to learn a lot about how time affects us, how it triggers certain emotions, and how it helps audiences have a particular relationship with cinematic time. So it's primarily not about my awareness, but about their awareness.

In terms of Buddhism and quantum physics, I don't think that they are particular systems of knowledge that the audience must learn in order to understand *Uncle Boonmee* and other films of mine. They relate to cinema in general and life in general. I don't view Buddhism as a set of beliefs or a religion. For me, it's a way of life. So cinema, no matter what it is about, can be Buddhist this way. It's not about "Buddhist films," but certain films can evoke something Buddhist.

Your works can be called "ghost stories," not simply because they deal with fantasies and myths teeming with apparitions or surreal encounters with something uncanny, but because they demonstrate that film is a medium of phantoms, a medium for the inscription of what does not exist in front of the spectator. This is why your works are important to the current situation where cinema has increasingly been regarded as an old form of art. For you are devoted to resurrecting the power of film as a medium that brings to life what is invisible or imaginary. In this sense, your use of cheap special effects, which nonetheless evoke wonder, fear, and terror successfully, can be said to be your response to industrial cinema dominated by state-of-the-art technology. How do you see your works against the backdrop of current cinema, so affected as it is by digitization?

Film is still like an entity by itself. The phantom is not disappearing but something that transforms itself. Cinema also has been transforming itself. Thus cinema can be a phantom in this sense: because it's something that you really need to dream. Cinema is a vehicle we produce for ourselves and as part of us. It's like an extension of our soul that manifests itself. Concerning new technology, the soul is changing and I don't think it's naturally good or bad way. It's just changing and we need to pay attention to how it influences cinema. I don't make a strict judgment of what's going to die in cinema. I wanted to express my longing for the old Thai cinema in *Uncle Boonmee*, but my aim was less to revive the old cinema itself, than invite the audience to realize what was there before.

Thus, on the other hand, I'm open to embracing current technological changes, and I don't believe that the digital will make cinema die. The problem is how we use these changes to serve a director's creative innovation. We have to be concerned about how these tremendous changes in the production and distribution of cinema will affect each creator. I believe that this is where genuine innovation will be made.

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ABSTRACT An interview with Thai director Apichatpong Weerasethakul, winner of the 2010 Cannes Palme d'Or for his haunting feature, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, in which he discusses the relationship between the film and a 2009 installation, *The Primitive*, as well as the impact of digital technology on cinema.

KEYWORDS Thai cinema, *Uncle Boonmee, The Primitive, Tropical Malady*, digital cinema

FATIH AKIN'S CINEMA OF INTERSECTIONS

NOAH ISENBERG SURVEYS THE CONTEMPORARY GERMAN DIRECTOR'S INTENSE, MADCAP FILMS

"We wanted workers," Swiss playwright Max Frisch once remarked of the so-called *Gastarbeiter*, or guest workers, that began pouring into Germany in the early 1960s, "and we got people." These same people, mostly from Turkey, Greece, the former Yugoslavia, and Italy, eventually had families. And the children of these families grew up in a country that, while perhaps not entirely their own, has become, at least on a cultural and social level, as much theirs as is the country of their parents. German director Fatih Akin, whose parents migrated to Germany from Turkey in the mid-1960s, was born in Hamburg in 1973 and has made this very subject—the tricky balancing act that shapes the existence of people like himself who juggle more than one language, tradition, and set of codes—a leitmotif in his films. Over the course of the past decade and a half, he has produced a rich body of work in which he positions himself as director, and positions his subjects, in that same dialectical universe that a stray road sign from his delirious road movie *In July* (*Im Juli*, 2000) so pithily suggests, its arrows pointing in opposite directions: Hamburg–Istanbul. Akin consistently casts his probing gaze on the competing forces of these two distinct, but intersecting worlds, revealing their resistances and collisions as well as their affinities.

Beginning with his first dramatic shorts, *Sensin: You're the One!* (*Sensin: Du bist es!* 1995) and *Weed* (*Getürkt*, 1996), made while he was still a student at Hamburg's Academy of Fine Arts, Akin has examined, often playfully and provocatively, the recurrent dilemma of reconciling dual identities. The first film, a comedy, chronicles the madcap search by Kubilei (Akin), a young Turk from Hamburg, for an ideal mate: she has to smoke Marlboros, listen to punk, and be into Robert De Niro. And as no mere afterthought, she also has to be Turkish. Akin wrote, directed, and starred in the film, as he did in his next film, *Getürkt*—literally "turked," but also slang for "gypped" or ripped off. This second foray into the comedic short offers a variation on the same theme, revolving around a tedious summer holiday on the Black Sea at the bungalow of a female guest worker (Nadire Ilter) and her mischievous twentysomething son Musa (Akin), who does all he can to pawn off the weeds he digs up in his mother's garden as dope from Amsterdam. This, he believes, is his ticket to acceptance among the German-born Turkish thugs who otherwise block him from entering the town disco, his only chance for distraction and entertainment. The film, which reaches its literal high point in a zany scene shot from inside a smoke-filled car and laced with snappy dialogue in broad German slang, contains more than just a nod to the stoner humor of Cheech & Chong, but its central gag cuts a bit closer to home: you can take the Turk away from Germany, but you can't take the German—the habits, the speech, the sensibility, the dope—away from the Turk.

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IN THE HOOD, ON THE ROAD

Akin grew up in Hamburg's Altona district and the eclectic, colorful world of that neighborhood serves as the setting for his first feature-length film, *Short Sharp Shock* (*Kurz und Schmerzlos*, 1998), which he also completed while in film school and which earned the Bronze Leopard at the Locarno International Film Festival. It tells the story of three toughs in their twenties, Costa "The Greek" (Adam Bousdoukos), Bobby "The Serb" (Aleksandar Jovanović), and Gabriel "The Turk" (Mehmet Kurtulus), who are thick as thieves. Begging comparison to Martin Scorsese's *Mean Streets* (1973), but also to John Singleton's *Boyz n the Hood* (1991) and Mathieu Kassovitz's *La Haine* (1995), the film offers a highly self-conscious, studied take on the American gangster film. The three chums profess, in their semi-improvised banter, a deep love for *Scarface* (1983), speaking worshipfully of Al Pacino, teasing each other with such names as Bobby Capone, and mugging for the camera—when a snapshot of them is taken at a family wedding—flashing the faux hand gestures of L.A. gang members.

Fatih Akin
Courtesy of Strand Releasing.

Short Sharp Shock starts with a bang, really the crash of a car window, and the sound of an alarm as Costa lowers his body into a BMW and snatches the stereo. But even before that, in the credit sequence, a series of tightly framed, quick-cutting shots, photographed at close range against a muted sky, shows a group of street fighters doing martial-arts moves to the rhythms of the undulating score. It's relatively clear from this point on what to expect. These are the type of guys who sit around on the couch watching Hong Kong action movies, sharing a joint and fantasizing about making it big; the type of guys who, despite their hamstrung efforts, can't ever get a break. As writer and director, Akin shows a certain spiritual kinship with his characters, giving a cameo as a soul-searching dope dealer named Nejo, an odd dude with glazed eyes and nervous speech, who tells a shaggy story of unwittingly breaking into a car he thinks is his own and storing the gun he finds in its glove compartment in his fridge. Stylistically, too, *Short Sharp Shock* replicates the atmosphere, in terms of lighting (natural and low-key) and sets (bordellos, gambling parlors, nightclubs), of a gangster picture or, perhaps, even more so of a neo-noir. The cinematography by Frank Barbian, who also shot *Weed*, luxuriates in the shadow play of Hamburg at night, his swift-moving camera capturing the half-lit alleyways and parking garages, along with the flickering skyline, the storefronts, graffiti-tagged walls, and rain-soaked streets. Such flourishes of noir, however, are not limited to cinematography alone. In one of the film's final scenes, when Costa, suffering from stab wounds inflicted by an Albanian mobster, lies dying in Gabriel's arms, drenched in shadows and singing a Greek ballad, he strikes the pose of a mortally wounded Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray) in the final sequence of *Double Indemnity* (1944); in both cases, a deep tenderness buried beneath the tough-guy exterior is laid bare.

Despite its wider scope, and its generic trappings, the personal-identity issues that percolate throughout his two shorts are not altogether absent here. The three leads frequently rib each other about their immigrant backgrounds, about the stereotypes associated with each of them, and about the lack of understanding of their families. Haggling over a deal on a stolen laptop, Bobby and Costa resort, for comedic effect, to the heavily accented, broken German of their parents. Akin frequently deals with such matters lightheartedly, as he does in the shorts, and with acute self-awareness. When Bobby announces, for example, that he, a Serb, is going to work for an Albanian, he defends his position saying, "today they call it *multikulti*." Their relaxed, liberal attitudes aside, the characters still have trouble shaking free of their residual ties to family tradition: Costa looks for salvation—or to elude what he fears is a curse on him—in a Greek Orthodox church; and Gabriel, who in an earlier scene sneaks out of a mosque, kneels in atonement in the film's poignant final shot to pray with his father, the lamentations of a Turkish folk song resonating in the background.

As if taking Bobby's proclamation on multiculturalism to heart, *In July* travels freely across boundaries—fittingly enough, Akin plays the part, another sly cameo, of a Romanian border guard—and continues with the cultural import-export business that encompasses so much of his artistry as a director. Casting Moritz Bleibtreu, who had already earned international recognition for his performance in Tom Tykwer's *Run Lola Run* (1998), in the lead role of Daniel Bannier, an aspiring physics teacher from Hamburg, Akin confects a love story as hallucinatory road trip. Opening with an unusually long take of a desolate highway, somewhere on a sad stretch of road that leads to Istanbul, a black Mercedes inches its way closer into the frame before it stops on the shoulder. The driver, a gold-toothed Turkish Berliner in alligator boots named Isa (Mehmet Kurtulus), who is transporting the body of his dead uncle back to Turkey in his trunk, steps out of the car and looks up at the sun during what appears to be a total lunar eclipse. Suddenly, when Isa takes a peek into the trunk giving a spritz of air freshener to mask the stench, Daniel—who, we later learn, has lost his ride to Istanbul—sneaks up on him from behind only to have Isa turn his flame-enhanced aerosol can on him and nearly commit a roadside murder. After this prologue, Akin introduces flashback narration allowing him to bring several disparate but interlocking strands of the story together, something he pursues to even greater dramatic effect in his later work.

We go back several days in time, to the moment when the shy, slightly clumsy Daniel, whose initial gestures vaguely resemble those of Cary Grant in *Bringing Up Baby* (1938),

stumbles upon a neighborhood flea market on his way home from school and ends up buying an old Mayan ring thought to be a lucky charm. Or at least that's what its seller, the dreadlocked Juli (Christiane Paul), who has an unspoken crush on Daniel, tells him. She also tells him, against his stiff Nordic disposition, to follow the sun, a ploy that she hopes will bring him closer to her. But the farcical thrust of the film makes sure that the planned meeting between Juli and Daniel at an outdoor concert gets tripped up and replaced by his falling for a stunning Turkish woman named Melek (Idil Üner), who happens to arrive wearing a tank top with a sun emblazoned on it when we first see her (shot in slow motion, walking knowingly toward the camera). While eating with Daniel at a local Turkish restaurant, Melek, who is merely passing through Hamburg on her way back to Istanbul, tells of a planned rendezvous underneath the Bosporus Bridge. Although it's not Daniel she's planning to meet, he decides to heed Juli's words and follow the sun.

Far more significant than the film's convoluted plotlines, which include quite a few flights of fancy—a ganja-inspired rendition of "Blue Moon" suspended in midair while riding a freighter down the Danube, a fever dream in a Budapest night-

First features

Top two: *Short Sharp Shock*. Photo: Gordon Timpen. © Wüste. Others: *In July*. © 2000 Wüste Filmproduktion. DVD: Koch Lorber Films.

club, the hotwiring of a car on the Romanian border, among others—are the ways in which Akin uses the road movie, and the tale of Daniel's path from Hamburg to Istanbul, as an opportunity to reflect more generally on transit. To be sure, Akin's cinema is shot through with travel motifs (airports, taxicabs, automobiles, bus depots, hotel rooms), and his characters are perpetually on the move. In the case of *In July*, there is the frenetic border crossing of Daniel and Juli, and of the film's ancillary players, and the overriding sense that the old idea of nation, with rigidly defined boundaries based on language, culture, and ethnicity, no longer holds today. In an otherwise minor scene in the film, Daniel, after being thrown overboard from the freighter on which he and Juli were traveling, is picked up on an empty dirt road by a female bus driver named Luna (Branka Katić, best known on these shores as the ambiguously foreign coffeeshop girl in HBO's *Big Love*). As he climbs into the passenger seat and he and Luna drive off, Akin has Pierre Aïm's camera rest for a moment on the anachronistic YU sticker still affixed to the bus's rear panel, updated now with the thick red spray-painted letters "Ex" over it. This mildly utopian, fundamentally revised universe, as Akin paints it, presents a portrait of a newly configured Europe in which Turkey, on its periphery, and Germany, at its heart, are merely a road trip apart.

LOVE AND DEATH

What *In July* may lack in visual intensity and existential heft is amply made up for in the first two installments of what Akin has dubbed his "love, death and devil" trilogy (the third and final installment has, as of this writing, yet to enter production), *Head-On* (*Gegen die Wand*, 2004) and *The Edge of Heaven* (*Auf der anderen Seite*, 2007), his most ambitious and most widely celebrated feature-length work to date. While *Head-On* addresses the psychologically taxing and occasionally deadly predicament in which acculturated German-born Turks find themselves today—attempting to elude the forces of religion and kinship while not quite blending into the dominant social fabric of their new home either—*The Edge of Heaven* reveals how inextricably connected the larger story of German and Turkish life has become, how much the clashes on screen are not merely coincidental but fundamental to an evolving identity on both sides. Together these two films catapulted Akin to fame on an international scale, receiving the 2004 Golden Bear prize at the Berlin Film Festival for *Head-On* and Best Screenplay for *The Edge of Heaven* in 2007 at Cannes.

Pairing a downtrodden nightclub janitor called Cahit (Birol Ünel), a mercurial figure with a dark past, a mean

Between two worlds

Head-On. © 2003 Wüste Filmproduktion/Corazón International/ NDR in Zusammenarbeit mit arte. DVD: Strand Releasing.

drinking habit, and a short fuse (an intern on the production, who oversaw the making-of featurette included on the DVD release, aptly refers to him as "the Turkish Kinski"), with the charming, seductive, and habitually suicidal Sibel (Sibel Kekilli, whose own offscreen past in the adult entertainment industry generated endless headlines in the German tabloid press), Akin ensures that *Head-On* has enough emotional force and psychological energy for an entire mini-series. But what keeps the film from entering into the maudlin, pathos-laden world of such a series—the two leads meet at a psychiatric clinic, after all—is the combined force and energy of Akin's direction and the intense performances he manages to get out of his two leads and supporting cast. With his hunched posture, unruly salt-and-pepper mane, sad eyes, and weather-beaten handsome face, Cahit comes off as a post-punk antihero adrift in the world, the iconic poster of Siouxie and the Banshees hanging on his apartment door providing a glimpse of his cultural allegiances; he claims, in conversation with Sibel's overbearing, conservative brother (Cem Akin), that he's "thrown away" his Turkish. Early on in the film, we see him driving his car at full speed, feeling no pain while the dark chords and screeching sounds of Depeche Mode's "I Feel You" reverberate from his stereo, into a concrete wall. Likewise, Sibel's take-no-prisoners attitude, ferociously demonstrated by her willingness to slit her wrists with a broken beer bottle rather than face the oppression of her unwaveringly dogmatic Turkish family, proves a strangely suitable match for Cahit, ironically not a far cry from the one Kubilei searches for in *Sensin* (in a late scene, one of the film's few comic interludes, in which Cahit is driven from the airport in Istanbul by a Turkish taxi driver from Munich who speaks Bavarian dialect, we also see a flicker from *Weed*).

The show wedding that formally brings the scrappy couple together is just that: a replaying of the rituals we see near the start of *Short Sharp Shock*, but this time merely as a ruse to appease Cibel's family and grant her freedom. Even during the wedding itself, the coked-up couple does a delirious, latently erotic dance that anticipates their subsequent dance to Sisters of Mercy's high-octane "Temple of Love" in Cahit's apartment and their defiant shouting of "punk is not dead!" It also anticipates the tortured schizophrenia of their relationship—their insistence that they are not a married couple and their gradual, painful steps toward becoming one. Sibel's sexually liberated stance (she giddily announces to Cahit in a disco, "I'm going to get laid") and his charged on-again-off-again sexual relationship with a German hair stylist (Catrin Striebeck) ultimately recede allowing their unanticipated

Istanbul tragedy
Edge of Heaven. © 2007 Corazón International. DVD: Artificial Eye (U.K.).

mutual attraction, and *amour fou*, to take hold, if only to be tripped up by additional barriers.

Akin introduces each of the film's critical transitions by way of a Turkish chorus, with musicians lined along the Bosporus river and a lone female singer at the center, commenting obliquely, often ruefully, on the story that unfolds before our eyes and in several instances allowing the melancholy instruments to speak for themselves. As he does elsewhere, he employs music as a means of enhancing his visual storytelling, not merely as an adornment or an ambient flourish but as a narrative voice in conversation with the actors, the director and, ultimately, the audience. In a revealing instance, when it appears that Cahit and Sibel finally recognize their love for one another, Sibel is shown whirling around on an amusement park ride, a big smile on her face, with Wendy Reme's "After Laughter" serenading her. Aptly enough, the tears do follow, as the song's refrain tells us, and Cahit is shown beating a former lover of Sibel's to death in the next scene, sending Cahit to prison and Sibel to Turkey to escape the "honor killing" that her family would feel compelled, and in fact attempts, to perform on her.

Shuttling back and forth between Istanbul and Hamburg, *The Edge of Heaven* is structured around two deaths and the ensuing collisions of three separate pairs of characters, each of which is strained and eventually estranged or separated by death: a Turkish father and son, Ali and Nejat Aksu; a Turkish mother and daughter, Yeter and Ayten Öztürk; and a German mother and daughter, Susanne and Lotte Staub. Much like the narrative structure of *In July*, Akin opens *The Edge of Heaven* in the present, with a long panning shot that brings us to a filling station somewhere near the Black Sea, with Nejat (Baki Davrak) driving through the breathtaking Turkish landscape alone in a strangely serene state of melancholia suggestive of Abbas Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry* (1997). The flashbacks then come in the form of three separate, but overlapping parts, "Yeter's Death," "Lotte's Death," and "The Edge of Heaven," finally bringing us back to Nejat's drive and replaying the opening sequence before reaching the film's open ending with Nejat seated, almost like a figure in an oil painting, on the beach in unfulfilled anticipation.

The generational conflicts that Akin handles elsewhere in his opus—the pitched Oedipal battles and other forms of rebellion fought by the youthful, forward-looking characters of his films—come to violent expression in *The Edge of Heaven*. A professor of German literature in Bremen, Nejat is seemingly most at home in the world of German letters (later, after moving to Istanbul, he fittingly takes over as proprietor of a German bookstore), quoting from Goethe and often answering his father's Turkish questions in German; his father Ali (Tunçel Kurtiz), by contrast, holds fast to the ways of the old country, asserting his ownership of Yeter (Nursel Köse), whom he first meets working as a prostitute and brings into his home in the hope of establishing a semblance of normality. Ali's violent outburst, triggered by the suspicion Yeter has betrayed him, results in her death and an irreparable rift between him and Nejat. Though different in many respects to that between Nejat and his father, the fraught relationship of Lotte (Patrycia Ziolkowska) and her mother Susanne (Hanna Schygulla) also pivots on the generational conflict, with Susanne's bohemian past papered over by the bourgeois complacency of her middle-aged life in Hamburg ostensibly precluding the kind of social engagement her daughter demands. Susanne and Lotte spar over the latter's youthful idealism as well as her romantic and political devotion to Ayten (Yeşilçay Nurgül), a charismatic radical upstart and political refugee whom Lotte falls in love and takes under her wing, and for whom she doggedly insists on fighting to the bitter, lethal end. Ayten and her mother Yeter have long lost contact with one another, but are shown, in Akin's parallel stories, unknowingly to brush up against one another (as Nejat does with Ayten in Istanbul).

In his fearless treatment of cultural taboos and the dexterity with which he handles explosive social drama, Akin shows himself, specifically in his trilogy-in-progress, to be a legitimate heir to the Fassbinder estate. The affinities between *Head-On* and *Ali: Fears Eats the Soul* (1974), whether in their unflinching depiction of race and German identity or in their love of lush colors, dark eroticism, and the languid camera movements that convey their visual aesthetic, are plain. In essence, *Head-On* is the tale, allegorically speaking, of Ali's children. Similarly, Akin's choice in casting Hanna Schygulla as Susanne in *Edge of Heaven* is a conscious invocation of Schygulla's career as Fassbinder's muse, in particular her lead in *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1979)—that icy, detached stand-in for postwar German political culture—which formed a cornerstone of Fassbinder's own trilogy. Her solo scene mourning the loss of Lotte in an Istanbul hotel room, shot from above and using stop motion to convey her bodily contortions of grief, is among the film's most powerful and unsettling. Akin compresses time, space, and emotion into this brief but essential sequence, cornering Susanne in her otherwise grand, sumptuous room, as she enacts without speech the full complexity of her loss.

FOOD FOR THE SOUL

In the final week of production on *The Edge of Heaven*, Akin's longtime collaborator, friend, and co-founder of their independent production company Corazón International,

Andreas Thiel, dropped dead of a stroke at the age of forty-eight. Akin and Thiel had long talked about doing something lighter, less fraught with politics, history, and memory, more pitched at the masses. During the final editing of *Head-On*, Akin dashed off a script that drew heavily from the life of his writing partner and stand-by actor Adam Bousdoukos, who owned Taverna, a popular restaurant in Hamburg that Akin frequented on a regular basis, and had recently endured a nasty split with his girlfriend. That script became *Soul Kitchen* (2009), which had its American debut at last year's Tribeca Film Festival, having picked up a Special Jury Prize at the 2009 Venice Film Festival, and was recently released on DVD by IFC Films. It marks a significant departure for Akin, a move away from the terrain of the two previous films and a return to the neighborhood.

Picking up where he left off in his role as Costa, the thief with a heart of gold in *Short Sharp Shock*, Bousdoukos plays restaurant owner and tough-luck magnet Zinos Kazantsakis. His restaurant, the eponymous Soul Kitchen, a greasy spoon in Hamburg's warehouse district famous for its fish sticks and free-flowing booze, faces a barrage of threats by health inspectors, tax collectors, and real-estate speculators. As if that weren't enough, Zinos's upper-crust girlfriend Nadine (Pheline Roggan), a journalist, leaves him behind to go on assignment in Shanghai and he promptly slips a disk in his back—allowing for plenty of gestural humor—when trying to lift the broken dishwasher in his kitchen. But with the help of his slick, dim-witted brother Ilias (Moritz Bleibtreu), out of prison on work furlough, along with a temperamental new chef named Shayn (Birol Ünel), whose culinary aspirations far exceed fish sticks, and a sharp-tongued waitress with bedroom eyes named Lucia (Anna Bederke), the place is transformed into a nightlife destination for all of Hamburg.

Seeking levity, Akin fills the script that he and Bousdoukos concocted with plenty of boisterous slapstick numbers. There's the tirade that Shayn throws at the tony restaurant at which Zinos first discovers him, when a customer asks to have his gazpacho heated up and Shayn plants his knife in the tablecloth (one American review ran under the witty title "Big Nacht"); the doomed Skype sex between Zinos and Nadine or her falling unconscious from sleeping pills mid-act during their last night together before she flies off to China;

Fatih Akin on the set of *Soul Kitchen*
Photo: Corazón International/Gordon Timpen. An IFC Films release.

Restaurant business

Soul Kitchen. © 2009 Corazón International. DVD: IFC Films.

Zinos's visits with a charming physical therapist named Anna (Dorka Gryllus) whose over-effective massage technique prompts a panicked request to flip over to his stomach; and their later visit to Kemal the Bone Cruncher (Ugur Yücel) to fix the uninsured Zinos's back once and for all. Much of the humor, even if a bit short on surprise, achieves the desired effect. It's hard not to chuckle, or even to belly laugh, when Zinos is on the dance floor at a disco doing his deep knee-bends and other therapeutic movements amid a sea of gyrating dancers. Part of what makes the film successful are the oddball characters—many of them created specifically for actors who collaborated with Akin in the past—including the crotchety Greek boat-builder Sokrates (Demir Gökgöl, who plays Sibel's strict father in *Head-On*) and the stooge-like poker pals of Ilias, Milli (Cem Akin, who has acted in nearly all of his little brother's films) and Ziege "The Goat" (Marc Hosemann, who has a memorable bit part as Sven in *Short Sharp Shock*). Rainer Klausmann, who photographed *Head-On* and *The Edge of Heaven*, puts his skills to good use here, as does Akin's faithful editor Andrew Bird, who has worked with the German director on every film since his first shorts.

More than anything else, *Soul Kitchen* focuses on the resilience of Zinos as he struggles to hold on to his restaurant, and to defend the home that it represents for its motley personnel and patrons, fending off the inhospitable forces conspiring against him, including the sleazy real-estate speculator in the figure of his old school buddy Thomas Neumann (Wotan Wilke Möhring). Yet the greatest threat of all comes from inside the family, when Ilias, mistaking himself for Dr. Mabuse, gambles the place away in a late-night card game with Neumann. At this point in the film, the overarching levity is stripped away, revealing something darker, even redolent of *The Edge of Heaven*. In what is perhaps the film's most poignant scene, Zinos, Ilias, and Sokrates are holed up in a dingy hotel room as visually confining as the one in which the grief-stricken Susanne finds herself in Istanbul, with Ilias doubled over in pain begging for forgiveness for what he's done to the restaurant, Sokrates pelting him with nasty epithets, and Zinos downing a bottle of wine in a near comatose state of disbelief. This scene, an obvious low point for the protagonists, is, however, quickly counterbalanced by their hair-brained scheme to break in and steal the deed from the municipal office before the transfer of ownership becomes final. The escapade fails almost from the moment that it's hatched, but it gives Ilias an unexpected chance to redeem himself, and, after a couple more plot twists, the restaurant is finally rescued for good.

A major ingredient of the film, never at the expense of the action but often sharing center stage, is the music. Akin already had experience directing a music documentary, *Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul* (2006), sandwiched in the middle of the two entries to his trilogy. In it, he has us follow Alexander Hacke, bassist of the German industrial thrash band Einstürzende Neubauten who helped score *Head-On*, to Istanbul where he meets with contemporary musicians, classical and popular, and almost like Alan Lomax in the Mississippi Delta, records their performances. Akin adeptly eludes the trap of ethnic essentialism by revealing the fertile cross-pollination of traditions: the Romani influence on Turkish folk music, the import of Seattle grunge by the rock band Duman and the speed rapping of Ceza, who spits his lyrics with similar verve and velocity to Busta Rhymes. In *Soul Kitchen*, he follows suit, moving outside of the Turkish German orbit to recognize his hometown's self-avowed predilection for American funk and soul, while also showcasing some of its local talents in rock and hip-hop.

Throughout the film, Akin, with the help of music supervisor Pia Hoffmann, draws on an infectious playlist that propels the narrative, amplifying the sensibility of his characters and their environment. Time and again we hear the synthesizer-heavy refrain to Zapp & Roger's "I Want to Be Your Man" as the signature ringtone of Zinos's cell phone. And Zinos himself offers as his emphatic retort to the tax collector Frau Schuster (Catrin Striebeck), as she and her colleague from the Finance Office do a repo job on his stereo for overdue payments: "Music is food for the soul." It's not long, as the story unfolds, before Milli and Ziege run off with the sound system of a local disco, relocating it to Soul Kitchen and giving Ilias the chance to woo Lucia with his prowess for spinning vinyl; Ivan "Boogaloo Joe" Jones's rapturous guitar playing on "Brown Bag" gets the place back on its feet. Along similar lines, in the film's orgiastic celebration—what amounts to an ill-fated sendoff for Zinos, hoping in vain to reunite with Nadine in China—Shayne's aphrodisiac-spiked dessert meets its match in Curtis Mayfield's "Get Down," with the tax collector Frau Schuster getting humped by Neumann on the dance floor. Akin periodically uses music to add a witty touch, as he does, for example, when Louis Armstrong's "The Creator Has a Master Plan" plays right after Zinos miraculously outbids his rival, speechless while choking on a button, in the public auction of the restaurant. Or the inclusion of old-time Hamburg movie star Hans Albers's crooner "Das Hemd," giving the film a dose of cozy *Heimat* flavor precisely at the moment that a frustrated Zinos is driving a forklift in the stockyards.

Musicology
Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul. © 2006 Corazón/ Intervista/NDR. DVD: Strand Releasing.

Sometime in the mid-1960s, around the same time that Fatih Akin's parents were settling in Germany and Dyke & The Blazers were releasing their rare-groove single "We Got More Soul," the American architect and architectural theorist Robert Venturi wrote a small manifesto in which he declared, "I am for messy vitality over obvious unity." These same words could be attributed to Akin, whose work favors a hybrid character that self-consciously incorporates the element of play, and that resists all notions of fixed identity. This is as true of his earliest shorts as it is of his latest pictures, the freighted works of his trilogy and the buoyant ode to Hamburg by one of its native sons alike.

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ABSTRACT A career survey of the work of Turkish German director Fatih Akin, whose films (notably *The Edge of Heaven* and *Soul Kitchen*) combine comedy with darker notes, emphasizing the theme of dual identity and paying particular attention to the use of music.

KEYWORDS *Short Sharp Shock, In July, Head-On, The Edge of Heaven, Soul Kitchen*

THRESHOLDS

As I write, in late March, I am no longer in Tokyo, having temporarily joined friends on stabler ground in Okinawa in the wake of what the Japanese media quickly named the Great East Japan Earthquake. The aftershocks in Tokyo and throughout the Eastern region are ongoing and the Fukushima reactors continue to bridle at efforts to contain them, but my task is to turn back the clock a few weeks and address films shown in a city that couldn't have anticipated the recent disaster.

The third Yebisu International Festival of Art and Alternative Visions (February 18–27) looked ambitiously to the future. The festival was launched in 2009 as part of a Tokyo Metropolitan Government project to win the 2016 Olympic games by promoting local cultural events (including the annual Roppongi Art Night and the Ikebukuro district's Festival/Tokyo for theater). Although the city lost its Olympic bid, the Yebisu festival has since grown with continued government support. Putting down roots in the Ebisu neighborhood, it has cultivated a "small village" ambience within the busy megalopolis. The main setting is the swanky Ebisu Garden Place campus, a slightly Epcot Center-like shopping pavilion, featuring reconstructions of a French château and a historic German-style red brick factory, built on the former site of the Yebisu Beer brewery (the spelling of Ebisu with a "Y" in English is an archaism sustained by the beer brand). Seen as the annual local cultural event to represent its good address, Yebisu is likely to flourish, and as of February there were plans to extend next year's event from ten to fifteen days.

As its name suggests, Yebisu is not only—or even primarily—a film festival. Its publicity materials proclaim an inclusive embrace of all "images," and the festival site is designed for this purpose: the central venue is the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography which has three floors of multipurpose gallery space as well as a dedicated movie theater. Yebisu thus straddles the black box and the white cube in a way that its general director Keiko Okamura maintains may be unique in Japan. On balance, this year's festival somewhat decentered cinema and threatened its privilege by means of the museum. In the galleries, work by Daniel Crooks, Harold Eugene Edgerton, and David Claerbout used strobe photography and digital manipulation to break down and reconstruct movement in relationship to duration, in a sense adapting the museum wall to perform as movie projector. Likewise, the programming in Yebisu's theatrical space often challenged the exclusivity of the movie screen. Many of the films projected had no particular need for the black box, and might have been more successful in the gallery space as looped, walkthrough installations. A number of featured artists—Cao Fei, Daniel Crooks, Harun Farocki, Keita Kurosaka, and Jan Svankmajer—were featured in both spaces as if to emphasize the interchangeability of the screening room and the exhibition hall.

Nonetheless, those of us seeking a film festival were not disappointed, especially when it came to screenings of archival material, including Mikio Naruse's last silent film, *Street without End* (1934). Naruse inherited this project from Yasujiro Ozu while still working at Shochiku's Kamata studio. The film follows the dramatically modern lives of a pair of Ginza café girls, their romances, adventures, and eventual disenchantments. Unlike in many melodramas, however, there is not a strong sense that these girls are held accountable for challenging tradition; rather, the inflexible classism of a high society family triggers moral punishment. The (imported) automobile also plays an interestingly dystopian role as a vehicle of unlucky coincidences and violent accidents. The film screened with a live *benshi* performance by Ichiro Kataoka and keyboard accompaniment by Mie Yanashita, who has also appeared at Pordenone's renowned festival of silent film.

Other historical highlights included a rare program of Croatian "anti-films." Several shorts by Vlado Kristl from the 1960s worked in a Brechtian burlesque register, combining group choreography reminiscent of a musical with the iconography of worker agitation, the whole assembled into a disjointed, repetitious montage reflecting the contrarian disposition of an "anti-"filmmaker. One of these films, *The General and the Serious Man* (1962), was suppressed under the Tito regime, leading Kristl to go into exile in Germany where he influenced filmmakers of the New German Cinema. The Croatian program also included a haunting film from the mid-1980s by Ivan Martinac, *House on the Sand*. Martinac was a product of the amateur film movement centered in Croatian film clubs in the 1960s. Largely without dialogue and in vivid color, this later film quietly studies its main character—an archeologist troubled by ominous

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Top: Yebisu discussion event at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography.
Bottom: Keita Kurosaka, MIDORI-KO production materials: early stage character design board, 1988.
Courtesy of Third Annual Yebisu International Festival for Art and Alternative Visions/Tokyo Metropolitan Musum of Photography.

MIDORI-KO
Courtesy of Third Annual Yebisu International Festival for Art and Alternative Visions/Tokyo Metropolitan Musum of Photography.

dreams—as if he were himself an ancient artifact or a sculpture in a museum.

Another strength of the festival was art animation. One of the signature events was a screening of Jan Svankmajer's new film, *Surviving Life*, with the filmmaker in attendance. But the big discovery was surely Keita Kurosaka's *MIDORI-KO*, a recently completed fifty-five-minute hand-drawn animation more than ten years in the making, which played to a full house. The narrative is a surreal progression dictated by visual free association: a girl living in a fertilizer factory and conducting some kind of botanical research becomes the caretaker of a vegetable with human features that seems to arouse everyone's appetite. *MIDORI-KO* can be contrasted to the flat look of Japanese anime, an aesthetic with roots in austerity conditions in which the image was maximally layered and composited in order to isolate only those precise areas that needed animating by hand, and to simulate movement in depth by means of relationships between layers rather than frame-by-frame background modifications. Kurosaka's film is mostly a succession of whole, uncomposited drawings, which must in part explain the decade-long production time. Compared with the modular anime aesthetic, Kurosaka's images seem dense and solid. His figures emerge in the same mottled textures of his backgrounds. The effect evokes a mutating object on the wall without a sense of penetration or masked offscreen space (the lateral movements of layers in anime, by contrast, approach and withdraw from offscreen space and suggest planes of motion in depth). This film was preceded by a short study of animation "metamorphosis" made by Kurosaka in the 1980s, an 8mm film that dissects a Rembrandt painting, transforming it into a cosmos of swarming molecular bits. Unfortunately it was not only the Rembrandt that had "metamorphosed," but also the film itself, which was transferred to high-definition video for the screening. The tiny 8mm picture, with its fuzzy textures and soft flicker, was blown up into a bleary, if stabler and more evenly luminous, video projection. This was a reminder, above all in the museum setting, of the material qualities of projected images.

The theme of this year's festival—"daydreams"—loosely organized the eclectic mixture of work on display. Appropriately for a festival still in its third year, Yebisu had the feel of a laboratory for testing the movie theater against the gallery, and at the level of individual programs there was considerable freedom for curatorial experimentation in an intimate atmosphere of workshopping and exchange with other curators. This year's event drew on a staff of programmers with Japanese festival credentials (including the major annual international festival Tokyo FILMeX) as well as guest participants from Japan and abroad. In addition to the screenings and exhibitions, there were also opportunities to interact with these professionals, including a seminar on film curating as well as roundtable discussions about the programs. Leading programmers from Vienna, Zagreb, and Paris were in attendance, indicating that Yebisu is successfully joining the international festival network.

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February was also a time to reflect on the previous year's films thanks to the annual ritual of critics' top-ten lists, published by two of Japan's major film magazines, *Kinema junpo* and *Eiga geijutsu*. Three of the most acclaimed Japanese films of the year—*Villain*, *Heaven's Story*, and *Confessions* (the latter of which also topped a worst-ten list)—deal with violent crime and its aftermath, and do so in similar ways. These films have *Rashomon*-style narrative complexity in common. The facts of a crime and the assignment of responsibility are obscured by multiple perspectives on what happened. In contrast with Akira Kurosawa's 1950 period film about a criminal interrogation, however, the problem for these contemporary movies is no longer too many conflicting perspectives, but rather the inability to form a clear picture of a crime from any perspective. Guilt and responsibility stay out of focus, hard to see, as if in the water or in the air (above all in *Heaven's Story*, which opens with a sinister encounter with the sea).

Villain, the least formally adventurous work, is a very well-made and powerful drama directed by the third-generation Korean–Japanese filmmaker Sang-Il Lee, whose 2007 film *Hula Girls* won the top Japan Academy prizes. The film

is based on a best-selling novel by Shuichi Yoshida (available in English translation from Pantheon Books) that tells the story of a murder largely from the point of view of the killer—a volatile, but ultimately lonely and sensitive young construction worker. Significantly, his crime cannot be explained without taking into account the cruel arrogance of a wealthy college student, who remains innocent in the eyes of the law, or even the mean-spiritedness of the victim herself. The film hinges on this complication of guilt, but the point is subtler than a simple rejection of responsibility in a situation where everyone is somehow "bad." The problem for the killer in choosing when and how to turn himself in, and what to do with the woman he loves, is finally the difficulty of *electing* to be a "villain" in the absence of moral certainty.

Confessions, the latest film from director Tetsuya Nakashima, takes the theme of generalized guilt a step further. One is hard-pressed to find a good character here. Bad is not a strong enough word for these people, even when it comes to the vengeance demanded by the wronged. Also based on a recent work of Japanese literature, the film slowly reveals murderous scheming and persecution within a junior high school classroom. In contrast to *Villain*, *Confessions* is far from subtle, but it is meticulous. Like Nakashima's previous work, including his 2004 masterpiece *Kamikaze Girls*, *Confessions* has a stylistic density and precision that reflects his background in the over-designed, compact form of television commercials. The film's breathtaking opening scene, in which a teacher makes accusations of murder in front of her class, is a polyphonic set piece. Cell phones, chatter, and objects sailing across the room in slow motion evoke a carefully deceptive scattering of attention. Distraction becomes a smokescreen covering discreet bullying and criminal secrets among students and spreading the focus of individual blame into general noise. While *Confessions* is quite visually spectacular and ultimately does not lack clearly drawn villains, it also plays skillfully on the threshold of visibility, separating action from consequence in a way that thematizes the problem of representing or fixing guilt (and in this vein the film also significantly invokes Japan's youth crime law, which shelters children under fourteen from legal accountability for violent offenses). Violence is most often an indirect or invisible process. Electricity, water, poison, infection (transmitted by syringe through imperceptibly small punctures), encryption, and remote control are among the tools used to visually remove cause from effect. *Confessions* (as its title suggests) has a *Rashomon*-like testimonial structure, but it lacks the framing story of an investigation, or indeed any kind of moral perspective from which to judge crimes. Everyone is a culprit.

Both *Villain* and *Confessions* were commercial hits in Japan; the same cannot be said for *Heaven's Story*. The fact that it appears among the best films of the year is all the more impressive considering that this largely self-financed project by veteran softcore director Takahisa Zeze runs nearly five hours including intermission and originally showed only in a handful of theaters in Japan (where I saw it in Tokyo, the theater charged a premium presumably to subsidize the once-daily screening). It also won two prizes at the Berlin Film Festival: the FIPRESCI critics' prize and the NETPAC prize for Asian cinema. In a loose and unhurried, sometimes messy novelistic fashion, *Heaven's Story* follows a multitude of characters in an island community that comes under the sway of a destructive force after a series of senseless murders. Injury and revenge are the themes, but the film names the omnipresent yet elusive malaise monstrous. "Monsters have taken up residence and the gods will not protect us," a narrator apocalyptically intones during the film's mythopoeic bookends. The point is emphasized in a climactic moment when two men, powerless against the unreasonable call to violence, assault one another at the foot of a Godzilla statue, as if to remind us of the connections and breaks between this new Japanese cinema and its more discernibly monstrous pedigree. Though the word "monster" is related to "sign" or "omen"—things that demonstrate (in Japanese, things that arouse suspicion)—the monsters in this film don't demonstrate or even appear, although violence indicates their presence. Structurally, the film withholds information about its characters' histories and relationships along the way, often suppressing the causes of their actions. The monsters here are blind spots that impair judgment and understanding.

With guilt so obscure and hard to isolate, these films dwell on the communal nature of violence and calamity. (Such problems of representation preoccupy other filmmakers as well, including Kiyoshi Kurosawa, who has been making peculiarly searching "horror" films since the 1990s.) Neither individual criminal nor monster can be blamed exclusively. In *Confessions* the monster is arguably the educational institution itself. In an earlier generation, Godzilla gave new shape to atomic terror, and to every other imaginable postwar crisis, but in *Heaven's Story* Godzilla is a fossil. Considering the devastation now facing Japan, one wonders whether there might not now be a renewed need for such metaphors.

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EDGE OF DARKNESS

The Turin Horse (Béla Tarr)

The head of a snorting horse juts into view and is abruptly jerked upwards by its as-yet-unseen rider. The camera, traveling at a galloping pace that matches the animal's, pulls back to reveal the cart the horse is pulling while its owner (János Derzsi), an elderly man, unforgivingly wields his whip. As the camera moves, in a continuous take, out of close orbit of the cart to capture the vehicle in full view, hurtling along a dirt track, the surrounding landscape is disclosed as stark countryside. Wind picks up dead leaves and flecks of dirt which swirl around the horse and man. The mood is of wintry desolation, captured in monochrome photography that is not so much black-and-white as degrees of gravestone grays.

Lasting several minutes, this sequence of long-take virtuosity opens Béla Tarr's *The Turin Horse*, which played in competition at the 2011 Berlin International Film Festival (February 9–19). It is customary to bemoan Berlin's official selection, and, with a few notable exceptions such as Paula Markovitch's *The Prize* and Ulrich Köhler's *Sleeping Sickness*, this year was as lackluster as recent editions. The world premiere of Tarr's much-anticipated film may then have occasioned mixed feelings for artistic director Dieter Kosslick. Long delayed, thanks partly to Tarr's famously exacting shooting style, *The Turin Horse* is an exemplar of the formally stringent, serious-minded auteur cinema that Berlin is routinely criticized for ignoring in favor of more red-carpet-friendly fare. So while the film's appearance in competition was a coup for the festival it also served to throw into relief the weaknesses of the rest of the program.

The title is taken from an anecdote told in voiceover during the film's black-screen prologue. In 1889 Friedrich Nietzsche, then staying in Turin, witnessed a cab driver beat his horse. The philosopher intervened and threw his arms around the animal, before collapsing. He took to his bed and succumbed to madness until he died eleven years. "Of the horse," Tarr's unseen narrator tells us, "we know nothing."

For the next two hours, Tarr's film stays with the horse and coachman. Still battered by the wind, the old man—identified as Ohlsdorfer in the credits—reaches an isolated stone cottage where he and his grown daughter (Erika Bók) settle the horse in its stable with a practiced and weary sense of habit. Echoing the sinuous rigor of the opening sequence, Tarr and his cinematographer Fred Keleman's Steadicam encircles the man and his daughter as they release the horse from harness, open and shut the wind-rattled stable doors, and pass in and out of the unlit barn.

The rest of the film is mostly restricted to the dim interior of the one-room shack. The subsequent six days unfurl in only twenty-eight shots that explore this peasant couple's environment in elegant, gliding movements attuned to the sluggish rhythms of the characters' activity. The environment is bare, the principal features of the household a table, two beds, some heavy wooden chests, an outside well, and the stable. You might say Tarr's narrative approach is similarly stripped of ornament. Dialogue is kept to a minimum, mostly restricted to gruff instructions delivered by Ohlsdorfer and received without complaint. A strong sense is conveyed of a grinding daily domestic routine that must have been established years ago. She helps the man undress for bed, the business of pulling off his tight leather boots an especially drawn-out affair. When he awakes the next day, she helps him dress. Dinner is a boiled potato: lame in one arm, the man breaks the skin with his good hand, flattens it in a single blow, and greedily picks at the steaming flesh. She fetches water from the well. They retire to bed as night falls.

Over the next days, the two of them return to these tasks—joylessly, mechanically—and the durational demands of Tarr's long-take shooting style communicate the severe monotony of peasant life. Yet this portrait of subsistence living exerts its own fascination, one derived from an hypnotic interplay between repetition and variation. As the week progresses, Tarr introduces disruptions to the couple's ordered

Shelter before the storm
Courtesy of Rendez-Vous (Paris).

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End of days
Courtesy of Rendez-Vous (Paris).

existence. These are initially small, unexplained changes; on the second day, for example, the horse refuses to work. As the week progresses, however, there is a gathering sense of disturbance that hints at wider chaos beyond the constrained world of the Ohlsdorfer cottage. A neighbor appears at the door to buy alcohol, the endless wind blowing outside. The nearby town, he announces matter-of-factly, has blown away; he then delivers a despairing speech about their godless and debased world, before staggering off, drunk, into the roaring gale.

Apocalypse advances nearer over the coming days. A band of Gypsies—whose depiction as harbingers of disaster feels provocatively close to ethnic stereotype—arrives to draw water from the well and is shooed away by the daughter. The next day the well is empty. The horse now refuses to leave its stall, or even to eat or drink. Ohlsdorfer decides that they should flee, but when they try to do so they are driven back either by the fierce elements or just a crumbling of will power. The wind grows even stronger and the landscape glimpsed outside seems to sink into a pale obliterating mist. Then on the final day, their world is plunged into darkness. The oil lamps won't light, despite being full of fuel. The final image is of the old man and his daughter sitting down, curtained by impenetrable black, to eat what may be their last meal. It is hard to miss the Nietszchean resonances of this tale of encroaching darkness and diminishing hope; just as one can't miss the Biblical parallels to the movie's seven-day account of the disintegration and dismantling of the natural order—a pastiche, and corruption, of the creation myth in which God is utterly absent by the seventh day.

Tarr's films are not for everyone; their arthouse purism is encapsulated in the trailer for *The Turin Horse*: a single fixed shot of an oil lamp, the flame flickering and dying against a black backdrop. Such a minimal approach has little commercial potential but those who have the patience will surely feel the mesmerising power of Tarr's uncompromising vision. In *The Turin Horse* everything that makes existence bearable or even simply liveable is stripped away, leaving Ohlsdorfer and his daughter to face a terrifying void. The director has said that this is his final film and, if this proves to be the case, we will have been left with a most unconsoling farewell to cinema. Leaving his characters suspended on the edge of an abyss, Béla Tarr withdraws. At the end the screen goes black. The Berlin auditorium seemed to remain in darkness for an uncomfortable duration and it was hours before I could shake the twilight spell of this majestic film.

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FROM 3D TO MUMBLECORE

Like most festivals, the Berlin International Film Festival has numerous sections, a little too much of something for everyone. Over the past decade the event has expanded its offerings to include a new perspective on young German cinema, a program for teenagers, a Talent Campus for aspiring directors, and a home for moving-image installations that don't quite belong in the cinema. It is even possible to take in a food-themed movie with a meal cooked by a star chef in a massive white tent, just steps away from remnants of the Berlin Wall. For those of us whose budget and enthusiasm were strained by "culinary cinema" at 59 euros a head, however, there remains the festival's meat-and-potatoes diet: the Competition, Panorama, and Forum of Young Cinema.

Director Dieter Kosslick predictably declared that the 61st edition of the Berlinale (February 9–19) would be "a platform for the cinema of the 21st century," and the Competition program played host to three films that continue the recent 3D revival: Michel Ocelet's animated silhouette film, *Tales of the Night*, Wim Wenders' *Pina*, an homage to choreographer Pina Bausch, and Werner Herzog's exploration of the ancient Chauvet Cave drawings, *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*. Perhaps even more so than Sundance's 2010 industry-oriented 3D Workshop or Telluride's more retrospective *Retour de flamme 3D* curated by Lobster Films impresario Serge Bromberg, Berlin's dedication, in its most prestigious category, of three consecutive time slots to this format represents the festival circuit's acknowledgment of the impact of *Avatar*.

There was naturally great interest in the fact that two of German cinema's most prominent *soixante-huitards* had decided to try the format. Wenders, more so than Herzog, seemed to grasp the aesthetic potential, for nonfiction filmmaking, of a visual field with added depth. Part dance film, part audiovisual requiem, *Pina* combines ensemble sequences by members of Bausch's Tanztheater Wuppertal with meditative portraits of the dancers, each remembering Bausch in his or her native language via voiceover. At other points, the dancers enact Pina's movements in past roles, as if inhabited by her memory, or take their expressive art to the city streets in a striking juxtaposition of foreground action with industrial architecture. Wenders has an eye for the moments in which depth perception matters. For instance, he explores the emotional impact of 3D editing, where sudden shot transitions dynamize the play of proximity and distance. In one scene, from the dance *Kontakthof*, a row of dancers stands, in long shot, dressed for a party. The blond, exuberant woman in pink is young until she moves forward and a cut to a close-up replaces her body with the face of an older woman. A single cut shifts space, time, and identity as the musical track plays on. In this sense of loss and transience, accentuated by 3D's layered planes of action, perhaps Wenders has found twenty-first-century cinema's counterpart to the sublime serpentine dance of Thomas Edison's early films.

Pina
Photo: Donata Wenders. © Neue Road Movies GmbH.

Herzog's foray into 3D, first screened at Toronto in 2010, is less engrossing. Certainly his access to 30,000-year-old cave drawings enables a cinematic thrill of the unseen. In his typically exuberant and seductive voiceover, Herzog claims that these ancient images, sketched in cubistic seriality on the undulating cave walls, testify to a pre-cinematic urge to animate two-dimensional representations. The trouble is that his crew was given only restricted access, confined to the cave's walkway, and the film's ability to maximize 3D effects is limited as a result. Indeed it could be said that the director's gloriously performative narration—especially when supplemented by English subtitles jumping out from the screen—is the most compellingly three-dimensional element of *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*.

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JOE SWANBERG ON *SILVER BULLETS* AND *ART HISTORY*

Brigitta B. Wagner: In *Silver Bullets*, you play a director who is depressed about the creative process and longs for a "new form" of filmmaking. How did this idea come about?

Joe Swanberg: David Foster Wallace killed himself around the time that I was starting to think about *Silver Bullets*. Then I read *The Seagull* for the first time a few months later and was really struck by Chekov's ability to talk about art within art. Movies about movies are already such a bad idea and such a danger zone for most filmmakers. It's really foolish to dive right into that. But as I was reading *The Seagull*, I was like, "Okay, here's a play about theater. Maybe I can take some of that inspiration." In my own reading of *The Seagull*, I feel like Chekov comes to the conclusion that art is not about creating new forms. It's sort of a dead end to create newness just for the sake of newness. Ultimately the artist's objective should be to portray life as he or she sees it and to tell stories that are meaningful to him- or herself and to other people.

***Silver Bullets* has a complex visual texture and, unusually for your work, a score. It's as though you are trying to find this "new form" for yourself.**

One of the titles I thought about initially for *Silver Bullets* was *Dead Formats*. I went out of my way to make sure that the film used Super 8, Polaroid, VHS, HD, 16mm—all of these different formats that are either dead or dying. I'm not a nostalgic person at all, and I feel like each of those formats has its place. If it doesn't have its place, then I'm fine with it disappearing. I don't feel the need to preserve everything because then there's less space for new things.

I've avoided music like the plague. *Nights and Weekends* doesn't have a touch of music. *Hannah Takes the Stairs* has very little. *LOL* is the only one of my films up to this point that even has something close to a score. Orange Might Trio's piece of music worked so well that I had them deconstruct it and send me all these variations. I had the music very early on—the musicians watched rough cuts and then sent me work—and it informed the editing.

The werewolf is both the subject of a film-within-the-film and an embodiment of the duality of your characters. Why the werewolf?

With werewolves, you have people who turn into these creatures when the full moon comes. They go off and wreak havoc, but the next morning they wake up and have no recollection of their actions. Werewolves are the perfect analogy for actors! Actors get cast in specific roles, and then suddenly they have permission to exist outside of themselves as other characters. When they return to normal life, they ask, "Did you cross any lines? Were you uncomfortable with some of the things you did? Were you even aware of some of the things you did? How deep into character were you?"

The new films maintain the highly realist, improvised dialogue of your earlier work.

When I started making my own work, I'd ask myself, "What do I know about being a twenty-two-year-old woman who is just out of college and doesn't have a boyfriend? Why would I sit down and write that dialogue? Why not just cast somebody who's going through all that and let her say those things?" That experience in the earlier films is still important to me now. If I'm going to be making a film [like *Silver Bullets*] about an actress who is cast in a film and dealing with her boyfriend's jealousy, I should work with an actress, like Kate Lyn Sheil, who has a boyfriend and is out auditioning and going through this stuff.

So in *Art History* when the two actors start talking awkwardly in bed about the sex scene they have just filmed, they are generating the content of that conversation?

That scene is 100% the camera rolling, me walking out of the room, and totally trusting them to be as real as possible. I didn't watch or hear what they were talking about. The microphones were hidden off camera, and no one else was there. I only heard what they said when I pulled the footage and watched it. If I had watched it and felt that it was wrong, we would have reshot the scene. By that point, we were already so deep into the production that everybody was on the same page. The most that I would say to actors before a scene like that is, "I'm going to leave the room, and I want you to get into a conversation about this topic." I certainly wouldn't feed them any specific dialogue.

Silver Bullets
Courtesy of Joe Swanberg.

The Forum, known for its challenging programming and discovery of new talent, presented less commercial instances of cinema's emerging forms. With a double feature by prolific do-it-yourselfer Joe Swanberg (see interview), the section continued to support the mumblecore strain of American independent cinema (following a screening of Andrew Bujalski's *Beeswax* in 2009). Swanberg had no fewer than three films at festivals in early 2011: *Uncle Kent* screened at Sundance, while both *Silver Bullets* and *Art History* were selected for Berlin. Reflections on his own filmmaking praxis, *Silver Bullets* and *Art History* probe artistic ambition, romantic desire, the subtleties of human communication, and the loose boundaries between performance and life. Deviating from Swanberg's earlier lo-fi realism, *Silver Bullets*, in allusion to Chekov's *The Seagull*, asks if new cinematic forms are even possible. When the actress Claire (Kate Lyn Sheil) accepts a role in a werewolf film directed by another young man (Ti West), her jealous boyfriend (played by Swanberg) laments his lost passion for filmmaking, an art form exhausted of innovation. Incorporating several formats, including HD, Super 8, VHS, and 16mm, scored with Orange Mighty Trio's aggressive instrumental tracks, and edited from scenes and images that recall a variety of generic conventions (from horror to porn to melodrama to YouTube antics), *Silver Bullets* attempts a complexly textured answer to the question of technological and aesthetic novelty.

Art History, a more meditatively self-referential drama, develops themes of intimacy and jealousy. In long takes of improvised dialogue, the small cast and crew of an explicit film negotiate professional roles and subtle, shifting passions in front of and beyond the camera. Confined to a suburban house with a swimming pool, a cauldron of interpersonal tension, *Art History* is both an homage to collaborative filmmaking in the era of HD and Craigslist (where Swanberg finds his sets) and a testament to the broader implications of image-making in a culture saturated with instant representations. Swanberg emerges with his new work as a philosopher of this makeshift cinema. The maturity of *Art History* and *Silver Bullets* confounds the accusations of self-absorption that usually trail mumblecore's young practitioners.

The Forum's affiliation with the Friends of the German Cinemathèque, which provides year-round programming of Berlin's Arsenal Institute for Film and Video Art, also makes the section the ideal platform for long-format films. Requiring unwieldy blocks of precious festival time, such work finds a more receptive audience among the local art-house crowd. This year's Forum epics, Takahisa Zeze's *Heaven's Story* and Christian Petzold, Dominik Graf, and Christoph Hochhäusler's made-for-television *Dreileben* (both running for four and a half hours), are both stunning narrative experiments.

Heaven's Story is a tale of revenge spanning several years and linking together a web of characters who might not otherwise have known each other. When the family of a little girl, Sato (played by two actresses, Kana Honda and Moeki Tsuruoka), is murdered, she comes across a TV news report of a young man, Tomoki (Tomoharu Hasegawa), who has similarly lost his wife and child to a violent crime. He vows to avenge them by killing their killer. When the murderer of Sato's family commits suicide, her own desire for revenge transforms into an obsession to help Tomoki, who has since settled into a new family life, to follow through on his threat.

Told in maxim-like chapters, *Heaven's Story*'s loose network of character motivations and disconnected incidents gradually form an intricate chain of causality. An abandoned industrial city—gray blockhouses among first snowy, then green fields—serves as the backdrop to two lyrical and absurd murders in the revenge cycle. "Revenge is the closest city to heaven," a title proclaims, and as the film continues, its narrative economy begins to dissipate. Like Koji Wakamatsu's three-hour *United Red Army* (screened at the 2008 Forum), a study of violence and self-critique among Japan's 1970s leftist terrorists, *Heaven's Story* moves toward a point of excess. Revenge loses its narrative value in the last hour of the film as the deaths begin to accumulate. When Tomoki violently confronts his adversary in a children's playground, their struggle to eliminate each other recalls a similarly semi-comical death game in Rudolf Thome's über-cool *Red Sun* (1970). Yet *Heaven's Story* does not end on this lighter note. Takahisa Zeze, who got his start in Japan's softcore "pink" industry, exhausts revenge until all that is left is its origin: loss and grief.

Dreileben, programmed rather modestly at the festival's satellite venues, could have been more touted by the

ULRICH KÖHLER ON *SLEEPING SICKNESS*

Brigitta B. Wagner: *Sleeping Sickness* deals with European medics working in Cameroon. How did you decide on this subject?

Ulrich Köhler: I grew up in Zaire in the 1970s. My parents worked in Africa again in the 1990s, when I was a student in France, and spent more than twenty years in different development projects in Africa—in Cameroon, Sudan, and Zaire. I visited my parents often and talked with them and friends in the expat community about the complexities of living in a place where you will always be a stranger and in which the human relationships are asymmetrical. As kids, living in Africa, my brother and I were caught between worlds. We spoke Kikongo, the local dialect, with each other, German with our parents, and English with the American missionaries. My parents consciously decided to go back to Germany so that we wouldn't be as alienated as the missionary kids we met in Africa. They wanted to give us a sense of home and a language identity.

What was your cinematic approach to Africa?

The first decision was to choose the kind of landscape we wanted. For me it was really important to avoid East Africa and the white plains of the savannah. I wanted to portray a more closed world, a more banal, less spectacular, less exotic Africa. I felt that this other Africa, the one I know, had not been shown adequately in recent films. My cinematographer Patrick Orth and I looked at the script, analyzed the scenes, and watched other films like *The Last Movie* by Dennis Hopper, which conveys a sense of alienation. We also looked at Michael Haneke's post-apocalyptic *Time of the Wolf* and some work of Nouribé Eseylam, one of the pioneers of digital cinematography, since we were working for the first time with a Red camera.

Your film concerns the moral duality of a German man, Dr. Velten, in Africa and draws on themes from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Why return to Conrad if you are trying to avoid clichés?

I wanted to play with Conrad and the clichéd dramaturgy of films set in Africa. The idea was to start off with a very unexotic, realistic portrayal of the lives of expats and then move to a more classical fiction. I wanted to make a film that took its characters to a clearer end point than my first two films. In the last fifteen minutes, I really wanted to enter the Joseph Conrad dramaturgy and let the film end in the dark.

Sleeping Sickness
Photo: Patrick Orth. Courtesy of Komplizen Film GmbH.

There is a surprising ellipsis in the middle of *Sleeping Sickness*. As spectators, we come to accept the style, characters, and dramatic situation of the first half of the film, and suddenly our knowledge of and identification with Velten is turned on its head. Without explanation, there is a new protagonist, the French Dr. Nzila, a new location, Paris, and a completely different narrative style.

I wanted there to be some confusion for the spectator. Just like Velten, I wanted spectators to get lost, to have to find themselves again. I had a big fight with some people about the fact that I chose not to cue the spectator to the passage of time. We wanted there to be a shift in the production design and camera work between the two parts of the film. The Paris scenes are more conventional in style, but the dialogue also moves in the direction of comedy. The idea was to create a very clear and shocking break in the middle of the film, where you suddenly have this very clean production design. You can't really get close to Velten, who loses himself, who doesn't know himself anymore, so I felt that we had to see him from the outside. He also sees himself from the outside. He gets into a situation in which he doesn't care about anything—his project, his job, his new child. So in the second part of the film, I wanted the spectator to identify with an outsider, someone who is also trying to find out what's wrong with Velten.

Heaven's Story and *Hi-So*
Left: © 2010 Heaven's Project. Right: courtesy of Pop Pictures.

domestic industry. After a series of email debates, in 2006, on genre, aesthetics, and the state of German cinema, Dominik Graf of German film and television's more commercial camp joined Berlin Schoolers Christian Petzold (*The State I am In*, 2000; *Yella*, 2007) and Christoph Hochhäusler (*Low Profile*, 2005; *The City Below*, 2010) for this three-part cross between the *Heimatfilm*, often dealing with the underbelly of rural life, and the *Krimi*, the popular crime-investigation genre.

Each filmmaker, working with a different cinematographer, provided a ninety-minute perspective on an escaped convict taking refuge in the sleepy town of Dreileben (literally, "three lives") in the former East Germany. Though each episode shares certain characters, plot details, and locations, the style and mood of each is different. Petzold's love story gone wrong and Graf's tense dacha drama culminate in Hochhäusler's collaboration with cinematographer Reinhold Vorschneider (see my last Berlin report, summer 2010), a thriller that hinges, playfully, on a few seconds of missing video surveillance data. Though uneven and insufficiently interlaced, *Dreileben* creates a productive common ground for German popular television and arthouse cinema.

In terms of the most prestigious prizes, the winner of the Silver Bear for Best Direction was Ulrich Köhler (see interview), who graduated to the Competition with *Sleeping Sickness* (co-produced by 2009 Silver Bear winner Maren Ade) following a 2006 Forum entry, *Windows on Monday*. Like Aditya Assarat's second Forum feature, *Hi-So* (after 2008's *Wonderful Town*), *Sleeping Sickness* deals with globalization, identity, and displacement. Köhler's film, set among the European expat community in Cameroon, centers on the inability of a German doctor (Pierre Bokma) to leave Africa at the end of a stint in an international medical clinic. In *Hi-So*, a young Thai actor (Ananda Everingham) who has returned from a long period in the U.S. struggles to negotiate his own intercultural mobility amid girlfriends, friends, and events from two lives. Both films employ a disorienting narrative ellipsis to mark a temporal shift that is also a shift in the self-understanding of disturbed protagonists, and both directors inventively represent psychic fracturing in visual terms. The top award, the Golden Bear, was given to the Iranian Asghar Farhadi for his divorce drama, *Nader and Simin: A Separation*, whose ensemble cast also received acting accolades. Another festival sophomore (following *About Elly*, 2009), Farhadi keenly portrays an Iranian society sundered by conflicting religious and legal approaches to gender roles and family rights. When Simin (Leila Hatami) leaves him, Nader (Peyman Moaadi) takes on the religiously conservative Razieh (Sareh Bayat) as a caregiver for his aging father and adolescent daughter. Trouble ensues when Nader pushes Razieh, whom he suspects of stealing, out of the house and possibly causes her to miscarry. In the return of these three filmmakers and many others, the Berlinale signals a commitment to cultivating international careers. As old hands and new take on film technology's latest frontiers, the cinematic future of the festival seems rife with the social problems and complex identities of the global present.

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DAVID STERRITT

Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience by Carl Plantinga

Violent Affect: Literature, Cinema, and Critique After Representation by Marco Abel

Doubting Vision: Film and the Revelationist Tradition by Malcolm Turvey

After almost a century of theory, scholars and critics still disagree about basic questions posed by the moving-image media. What's now called classical film theory, inaugurated by Vachel Lindsay and Hugo Münsterberg, looked for cinema's medium-specific properties and debated the merits of "realist" and "formative" perspectives, while the 1970s theory boom, propelled by Marxism and psychoanalysis, looked for ideology in every image and false consciousness in every splice. Recent years have brought a cultural-studies turn, a film-philosophy turn, and a cognitive-psychology turn, but these developments have only emphasized that the basic questions remain unsettled. And with luck they'll stay that way, because efforts to resolve them are sometimes livelier and smarter than the movies that raise them. Three new books focus on issues related to perception, representation, and affect or emotion in film. Working from very different perspectives, they share a lack of interest in psychoanalysis and other twentieth-century relics, gravitating instead toward the incremental approach called for by today's post-theory theorists.

The title of Carl Plantinga's monograph, *Moving Viewers*, indicates the author's aim, which is to think about how popular films elicit emotional reactions from moviegoers, balancing theoretical abstraction with attentiveness to how actual audiences actually think and feel when they watch movies. He describes his approach as "cognitive-perceptual," an unwieldy but useful term. As the first word implies, he looks at pleasure, fantasy, and desire through the lens of cognitive rather than psychoanalytic theory. Unlike many cognitive film theorists, though, he tempers his rejection of the psychoanalytic unconscious with acceptance of a "cognitive unconscious," through which, he argues, ingrained patterns of perception, affect, and response help generate and shape our emotions. Emotions themselves are "concern-based construals" in Plantinga's vocabulary, meaning they are judgments that relate to the concerns we bring to the real-world situations we encounter (55).

Applying all this to the multiplex, Plantinga acknowledges that movies are by nature "conventional, expressive, exaggerated, or otherwise manipulated" versions of reality (62), but argues that they nevertheless call upon patterns of perception and response that we use in our real-world activities. In *Alien* (1979), for example, momentary "surprise and shock" naturally arise when the villain pops abruptly into view, while more complex and far-reaching emotions such as "suspense, anticipation, and curiosity" sustain our attention for longer periods, joining with the short-term effects "to create the contours of the particular experience offered by the film" (70). Moving beyond the multiplex, moreover, Plantinga observes that popular narratives of many kinds have therapeutic and communal functions similar to those of films, since they too body forth "virtual solutions to traumatic problems," thereby facilitating "distributed or social cognition" (226).

Rather than formulate a sweeping theory of cinematic emotion, Plantinga says he wants to craft a phenomenological account of the many heterogeneous pleasures that movie-viewing entails. One of the most interesting questions he asks is why moviegoers flock to a picture like James Cameron's crowd-pleasing *Titanic* (1997), wherein scenes of exotic travel, exciting melodrama, and youthful romance give way to detailed depictions of existential terror, piteous loss, and the extinction of thousands of lives, including that of the movie's charismatic hero. Why would these elicitors of "negative emotion" attract a huge global audience? Launching into his discussion on a page adorned with *Titanic* heroine Rose (Kate Winslet) weeping copious tears at the death of Jack (Leonardo DiCaprio), her shipboard lover, Plantinga notes that Cameron could have emulated many other films by operating in a "distanced mode" that replaces "strong sympathies for characters" with a more "critical, sometimes humorous, and occasionally cynical perspective" (171), as in *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), *Star Wars* (1977), *The Hunt for Red October* (1990), and *Memento* (2000).

Far from being distanced, however, *Titanic* clearly belongs to the fleet of "sympathetic narratives" that strive to elicit such feelings as sadness, compassion, and longing. The secret of appealing to audiences with negative emotion is to represent unpleasurable events in such a way that pain and loss are turned into entirely different qualities, which in *Titanic* take the form of "quasireligious, ritual affirmation of the proposed transformative power and transcendence of romantic love and self-sacrifice" (173). Plantinga's

Film Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 4, pps 73–76, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic, ISSN 1533-8630. © 2011 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2011.64.4.73

argument rests on the idea that a work as potent as *Titanic* puts a combination of affective modes into play, counterbalancing negative emotions with other kinds. These include *positive* feelings like excitement and exhilaration; *meta-emotions* such as pride at being a nice person who empathizes with Rose's loss; the *elevation* we may feel at seeing Jack nobly sacrifice his life; aesthetic *artifact emotions* prompted by pleasure at the skill and sensitivity of the filmmakers; and more.

Plantinga presents a compelling account of negative emotion in popular film, and he's equally successful in his discussion of "physical" and "sociomoral disgust" (203) as an ideological tool, found in movies with agendas as different as *Dirty Harry* (1971) and *Polyester* (1981), both of which he perceptively discusses. (If there's a second edition, I wonder if he'll take on *The Human Centipede*, released last year.) Issues of shame, guilt, mimicry, and synesthesia also receive thoughtful comment. My only real criticism of *Moving Viewers* is Plantinga's excessively careful presentation; while it's as clear a film-theory book as you'll ever read, the price for this is a good deal of plodding, repetitive prose. But readers seeking productive new ideas about the age-old topic of art and emotion will find that a price worth paying.

I wrote "art" rather than "film" just now because some of Plantinga's more interesting points arise when he extends his arguments from Hollywood film to popular narrative in general, moving toward the cultural-studies side of film scholarship. Marco Abel goes considerably farther in that direction in *Violent Affect*, which investigates a mixed array of popular texts—the Coen brothers' movie *Miller's Crossing* (1990), the *oeuvres* of Robert De Niro and Patricia Highsmith, *American Psycho* as novel (1991) and film (2000), Don DeLillo's writing about the 9/11 attacks—as vehicles for today's rhetoric of violence, in themselves and in the responses they evoke from critics. The villains in Abel's theoretical scenario are representation and judgment. By "judgment" he means the reactionary violence practiced by critics who interpret works of art, thereby destroying their inherent preconscious power. By "representation" he means narrative, identity, symbolism, and recognition, those longstanding pillars of conventional (and much unconventional) artistic expression.

Taking cues from Gilles Deleuze's work on Francis Bacon, which privileges affects, sensations, and instincts over mundane emotions and feeble feelings, Abel lobbies vigorously on behalf of affect and its kin, which he finds charged with violence of a progressive, liberating kind. Influenced again by Deleuze, he proposes that we engage with affective violence via "masocriticism," described as "a rigorous practice of experimentation" that questions and ideally shatters the habits of thought that one has acquired from, among other sources, everyday critical discourse, which Abel judges (despite his opposition to judgment) to be a one-dimensional mechanism for reducing the intensities of affect to a familiar and therefore "reassuring and comforting. . . ethical register" (57). Putting this into practice when 9/11 struck, for example, he found that suspending "quick and determined judgment" enabled him (and like-minded students of his) to exchange "the violent rush [produced by] asserting a stance of moral righteousness" for "the violent vertigo [of] an encounter with one's self as not always already being in control." In this manner they confronted a horrific instance of real-world violence "without reducing it to its representational quality or to a self-help discourse dominated by expressions of subjective experience," masochistically declining the opportunity "to territorialize the primacy of the . . . event onto the plane of subjective familiarity and knowledge" (184–86).

Abel's call for uncompromising encounters with affect, sensation, and violence in art is fundamentally a moral demand, aiming to replace static, defensive ethical systems with a shifting, intensive ethics that may be better conveyed by purely aesthetic means (such as the "surreal brown light" that augurs the doom of an ethically stunted character in *Miller's Crossing*, 1990) than by the meanings and messages of ordinary cultural products. I too believe that contemporary scholarship needs a major new injection of sensuousness, audacity, and sting, and I share Abel's high regard for Deleuze. In some respects, however, Abel's book lets down the side. Given the boldness of his positions, it's ironic that he falls prey to overcautious rhetoric; his writing on 9/11, for instance, positively strains to fend off the appearance of too much theoretical detachment. As inventive as his arguments can be, I'm sure there are more trenchant ways to demonstrate "the violence of mourning and melancholia" (138) than by close examinations of *Analyze This* (1999) and *Meet the Parents* (2000). His discussion of masochism à la Deleuze bogs down in binaries of "masochist" and "mistress," and I'd have more confidence in his prose if a locution like "point of views" didn't crop up more than once. And his enthusiasm for Deleuze-style hyphens far exceeds the statutory limit, as when we learn that De Niro's acting abilities encompass such feats as *becoming-silent*, *becoming-obese*, and indeed, *becoming-DeNiro* (sic, 157, 165). Insofar as *Violent Affect* seeks a radical renewal of criticism as a subversive art, its eccentricities are defensible and kind of charming; but its uneven, sometimes faltering tone ultimately detracts from its persuasive power.

The focus of *Doubting Vision* is what Malcolm Turvey calls "revelationism," an intellectual tendency embraced by those who believe "that human vision fails to see the true nature of reality" (49) and that cinematic technology offers a corrective for this deficiency. (The term "revelationism," which Turney uses for his own original purposes, is usually found in

theological discourse, referring to belief in divine revelation.) Thus, for example, Hungarian author Béla Balázs and French writer–filmmaker Jean Epstein claim that close-ups make inner emotions manifest by drawing out otherwise imperceptible details of the human face and the expressive objects with which it interacts. Influenced by Henri Bergson's philosophy, Epstein further praises cinema for enabling humans to perceive the fullness and interconnectedness of space and time. German theorist Siegfried Kracauer argues that the concreteness of the cinematic image reduces the abstractness that grips our minds in the hyper-rational modern era, while Soviet cineaste Dziga Vertov contends that nonfiction film can reveal social relations to the eye by reordering reality with camerawork and montage. Extending this lineage into contemporary film theory, semiotic–psychoanalytic thinkers laud reflexive cinema for cutting through the illusions of bourgeois ideology; philosopher Stanley Cavell and legatees of Kracauer and Walter Benjamin claim that cinematic realism alerts us to the isolation and fragmentation bred by modern life; and Bergson's influential heir Deleuze holds that modern cinema puts us in touch with the temporality, mobility, and cosmic connectedness from which Western thought has separated us for centuries.

All of which Turvey finds fallacious on numerous grounds, usually related to flaws in the ways theorists conceptualize such fundamental phenomena as visibility, illusion, ideology, certainty, and reality itself. Constructing his case methodically, he describes and explicates the suspicion of human vision built into several branches of classical film theory, and then teases out the assumptions underlying each variety of visual distrust, countering them with arguments based on ideas from Ludwig Wittgenstein and other philosophers. After this he does the same for contemporary revelationism, in a more concentrated and original manner. Then he circles back, tracing the roots of revelationism in the lingering romanticism, exaggerated skepticism, antimimetic schemas, and "antiocularcentric" biases of modern culture in general and modernist aesthetics in particular. He winds up by acknowledging that healthy skepticism toward visuality is in some ways a very good thing, and by offering his own attempt to "reconstruct the revelationist claim that [cinema] allows us 'to see more and better' than the other arts" without making the conceptual mistakes of his forbears (114).

The last chapter is the most engaging in the book. Turvey observes that Alfred Hitchcock's movies are full of revelations "in the sense of making visible the otherwise concealed cognitive and affective states of human beings by way of variable framing that allows the viewer to closely observe details of their behavior" (118), and he shows how the introduction of the two Charlies in *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) brilliantly exploits the graphic properties of cinema that silent-era theorists like Vertov found crucial to the art of film. He salutes Epstein and Balázs for proclaiming cinema's ability to bring out "anthropomorphic properties in nonhuman entities—to see clouds, for example, as threatening, or a home as welcoming," usually by "endowing the environments around agents with expressive qualities using film style" (121). Stan Brakhage reveals the richness of the quotidian world through camerawork and editing that are drastically different from the norm. And so on, in a concise exposition that reveals Turvey's own revelationism in persuasive terms.

The method and content of *Doubting Vision* often recall Noël Carroll's innovative theoretical analyses, most notably in *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory* (Princeton University Press) and *Mystifying Movies* (Columbia University Press), both published in 1988.Turvey's book is not likely to have such immediate impact or lasting influence, though, partly because his style is less vigorous than Carroll's, but mainly because his reasoning tends to be wound so tightly it can't breathe. Anticipating responses from defenders of the theorists he criticizes, Turvey allows that he may be accused of interpreting their writing too literally, of missing the point that rhetoric about "cameras seeing, or film . . . being distracting, or the cinematic image making its referent present or being an illusion, is metaphorical. Of course theorists don't believe that these things are literally true." He answers with two countercharges: that "if the claims of film theorists are not literal ones, then neither are the conclusions built on them," and that the theorists had no reason to construct these "metaphors" except to support "literal claims about the cinema's nature and functions" (98). It's an interesting self-defense, but to my mind an excessive literalness is exactly what weakens Turvey's book, advancing theoretical exactitude at the expense of creative intuition and philosophical play. *Doubting Vision* makes a valuable contribution to metacritical thinking about film, summarizing and explicating the revelationist tradition with clarity, rigor, and perception. But for soaring insights into what makes cinema the most fascinating, exciting, and revealing of the contemporary arts, I'll stick with Vertov's dithyrambs and Deleuze's fights of fancy any day.

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BOOK DATA Carl Plantinga, *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. $60.00 cloth; $24.95 paper. 280 pages.

Marco Abel, *Violent Affect: Literature, Cinema, and Critique After Representation.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007. $24.95 cloth; $24.95 paper. 292 pages.

Malcolm Turvey, *Doubting Vision: Film and the Revelationist Tradition.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. $99.00 cloth; $26.95 paper. 160 pages.

JAN-CHRISTOPHER HORAK

Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War by Anton Kaes

Weimar Cinema: An Essential Guide to Classic Films of the Era, ed. Noah Isenberg

For over sixty years, Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947) has been the 800-pound gorilla in the room of Weimar-era film studies, whether approved or deprecated. Kracauer argued that German cinema disclosed anti-authoritarian impulses ingrained in the mass psychology of the German people and that this mentality was conducive to the Third Reich. Kracauer's theory was a powerful tool for post-World War II critics attempting to understand the seemingly inexplicable, namely that the culture of Goethe could give birth to the mass genocide of the Holocaust. Recent scholarship, however, has questioned this teleological account, and Anton Kaes's new book is a notable example of the revisionist trend. Kaes argues that Weimar cinema needs to be understood as a response to the devastating impact of World War I on German culture and society. *Shell Shock Cinema* analyzes a handful of Weimar art-cinema classics in order to make visible the obsessions of Weimar's intelligentsia and, like one of those paintings that reveal a completely different picture when turned upside-down, it alters how we perceive the period.

Kaes points out in his introduction that the German film industry produced an average of five hundred "formulaic genre films" per year between 1920 and 1927, and that only a few were considered artistic, subsumed under the label "Expressionist cinema." Of those classics, the author presents close readings of four canonical films, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Terror* (1922), *Die Nibelungen* (1923), and *Metropolis* (1927). What mitigates the extreme narrowness of this selection, lending credibility and weight to his textual analysis, is Kaes's very broad survey of contemporary literary, historical, sociological, and psychological works, all of which support his contention that World War I was decisively important. The result is a richly nuanced work that provides a wholly new account of 1920s German art cinema as a site of national trauma.

Kaes sets the stage in his first chapter by reminding readers of the enthusiasm with which German intellectuals went to war in August 1914, perceiving the conflict as traditional German culture's battle against the barbarism of capitalist modernity. Cinema itself was pejoratively identified by Germany's elite with modernism, but also with *Schund* (trash), and therefore dismissed as a tool in the war effort. Only after the German military high command realized that allied film propaganda such as the British documentary, *The Somme* (1916), was being effectively employed against Germany, did it begin to take the medium seriously, amalgamating and nationalizing the industry under the Universum Film A.G. (Ufa). However, these efforts were too little, too late to make an impact on the war's outcome; in fact, few German films made at the time directly reference the war, the vast majority being comedies, melodramas, and unrelated action films. Furthermore, none of the propaganda films produced before war's end presented anything like the grossly exaggerated anti-enemy images generated by Anglo-American filmmakers. Thus the nation's cinema repressed both trauma and aggression, only for them to return after the war in distorted form.

Seen in this context, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* appears in Kaes's account not as a harbinger of future dictatorships, but as the epitome of a post-World War I German obsession with war guilt and neurosis, the culpability of the psychiatric establishment, a resurgence of mysticism and the occult, and the difficulty of perceiving reality in the face of war-created illusions. *Caligari*'s insane asylum is furthermore directly related to the experience of conscientious objectors and shell-shocked soldiers alike, who—like Adolf Hitler—were incarcerated in asylums before being declared cowards attempting to avoid service to their country. According to Kaes, "the film suggests that psychiatry managed to hide its murderous nationalist intentions and scientific charlatanism behind the façade of professional responsibility" (80). And just as the modern, highly technological battlefield obliterated any temporal or spatial coordinates between surviving and death, so too did *Caligari* eschew a comfortable and definable realism in favor of a multiplicity of contradictory viewpoints that more accurately reflected the chaos of war.

Much more than a vampire film, *Nosferatu* allegorizes a whole generation's confrontation with death. Because over two million German soldiers (roughly 15% of all Germans in the military) were killed between 1914 and 1918, F. W. Murnau's images of mass dying struck particularly close to home. If the vampire represents the extreme otherness of death, Thomas Hutter and other male characters are condemned to utter impotence in the face of it (as were soldiers in the trenches), while Ellen's hysteria is equated by Kaes with the secondary trauma of the home front. *Nosferatu* is thus read as a work of mourning for a population traumatized by the experience of war. The resurgence of the occultist entertainment is tied to Murnau's cinematic visualization of the vampire's power. Kaes even suggests that the similarity of the vampire's depiction to anti-Semitic iconography originates in the mass migration of Eastern European Jews, perceived by right-wing circles as war profiteers, to Berlin in the war years.

That conservative and nationalist forces in Germany could translate the war experience into a narrative of betrayal, while embracing apocalyptic visions of total destruction, is convincingly demonstrated by Kaes's reading of Fritz Lang's *Nibelungen*. The two-part film's climactic representation of voluntary, heroic annihilation not only mythologizes Germany's defeat, but also informs and presages the Nazi ideology of total war and national suicide in 1945: "*Nibelungen* would revive Germany's founding myth, which was imbued with epic themes—loyalty, high ideals, heroism in defeat—that resonated with the historical events of the past decade" (133). Given the pedigree of this mythology as the source for high-art adaptations from Hebbel to Wagner, Lang's adaptation not only gave respectability to film as medium, it also bridged the schism between modernity and traditional German values. According to Kaes, the first part of the film, *Siegfried*, encapsulated in its strong-bodied, blond Aryan hero the idealism of the Germanic race, struck down by the racial otherness of western capitalism, while the second part, *Kriemhilde's Revenge*, naturalizes extreme violence and the absolute value of death on the battlefield. Kaes writes: "Although this myth is highly ambivalent—the tale of a nation destined for catastrophe—it did not deter Germans from embracing it" (147).

Throughout his analyses, Kaes weaves a dense tapestry of cultural references, from a Berlin Police report from 1919 by Albert von Schrenk-Notzing (a leading specialist on the occult) about the use of hypnosis in popular entertainment to Bertolt Brecht's 1919 play, *Drums in the Night*, about a soldier returning home to find his wife in bed with another man, the veteran's trauma of emasculation replayed metaphorically in Lepold Jessner's Expressionist *Backstairs* (1923)—a point which Kracauer misses completely. These references to the *Umfeld* (knowledge available to well-read, contemporary viewers) undergird Kaes's theses and enrich our historical understanding.

Kaes is less persuasive in his reading of *Metropolis*, despite a veritable mountain of cultural and political references. He identifies the scene of the Moloch sacrificing workers as a war metaphor, given contemporary interpretations of World War I as the first machine-age war. He is, however, hard pressed to come up with further examples of metaphors that are directly linked to wartime experience, detouring instead through a whole catalogue of postwar phenomena that are part and parcel of modernity, whether Taylorism, anti-Americanism, big Capital, worker's revolts, or a resurgence of religiosity, all of which are only parallel phenomena to the war.

In his conclusion, Kaes discusses *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), and the film's German reception, but glosses over a number of German films that in fact represent World War I directly—not only *The World War* (1927), an Ufa documentary with staged reenactments discussed by Kracauer, but also three U-Boat films, including *Morgenrot* (1933), or such films as *Westfront 1918* (1930) or *No Man's Land* (1931). Weimar also saw a spate of so-called Prussian films, which were read by Kracauer as reflecting ideologies incorporated into National Socialism. But can they also be read in reference to World War I's failures, thus again turning the image upside-down? A film like Gerhard Lamprecht's *Der Katzensteg* (1927) seems ripe for such an analysis. That might however have been a different book than the one Kaes set out to write; he clearly states that *Shell Shock Cinema* is concerned with Weimar art cinema, which he brilliantly reinterprets.

Noah Isenberg is also concerned exclusively with art cinema in *Weimar Cinema*, though his book's subtitle and press release misleadingly claim that a multiplicity of genres is covered. The anthology sticks almost exclusively to the canon—"The volume focuses on the most significant, most widely taught, and most widely available films of the period" (9)—but Isenberg's introduction sidesteps the question of canon-formation, which is surely salient to a volume that purports to represent Weimar cinema as a whole.

The book's sixteen chapters each deals with a single film, from *Caligari* to *Kuhle Wampe* (1932), the latter Brecht's most successful film collaboration and recently available on DVD, as are all the other selected titles. That makes the volume an ideal textbook for German teachers wishing to expose their students to "the classics." The essays by Anglo-American Germanists, among them leaders in German cinema studies, including Thomas Elsaesser, Sabine Hake, Kaes, Lutz Koepenick, Maggie MacCarthy, Petrice Petro, and Marc Silbermann, are models of clarity. Each chapter blends close textual readings, production, reception history, and authorial study, a combination again ideally suited for classroom discussions even though it does leave historical, economic, and social matters at the periphery. And just as the volume seldom strays far from the beaten path in its selection of titles—Joe May's *The Indian Tomb* (1921) being the anthology's only non-canonized film—so too do the individual essays seldom break new ground, at least for the well-versed reader. Instead they summarize contemporary research, often first published by the authors themselves. © 2011 Jan-Christopher Horak

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Noah Isenberg (ed.), *Weimar Cinema: An Essential Guide to Classic Films of the Era*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. $89.50 cloth; $27.50 paper. 376 pages.

MARTHA P. NOCHIMSON

The Sopranos by Dana Polan

Most critics writing about David Chase's *The Sopranos*, despite differences on specific points, have responded to it as a brilliant transposition into serial television of the gangster film tradition of searching for the darker aspects of American identity in the deviant lifestyle of the mobster. Taking the opposite approach in his recent book, *The Sopranos*, Dana Polan reads the story of Tony Soprano (James Gandolfini) and his cohort as a postmodern tangle of anti-narrative devices that has paradoxically spawned a souvenir commodities cottage industry. Those who believe that television inevitably colludes with bottom-line consumer society to commodify entertainment will embrace Polan's approach. Others, who have received *The Sopranos* as a genuinely expressive work, will be critical. Yet even those open to Polan's thesis may find his book marred by overstatement and fuzzy thinking.

"*The Sopranos* on Screen," the first of the book's two sections, and its least convincing, anatomizes the series as postmodern anti-narrative. Detailing his personal reactions after a marathon viewing of the episodes, Polan concludes that "*The Sopranos* adheres to no simple logic or look in the chronicling of its curious fictions" (31). In Chase's tendency to tantalize viewers by withholding story closure—for example the famous episode of "The Pine Barrens" in which a Russian mobster may or may not have died while trying to escape Christopher Multisanti (Michael Imperioli) and Paulie Walnuts (Tony Sirica)—he finds anti-narrative. These points are valid reminders of Chase's disruptive indeterminacies and ironies. However, irony and indeterminacy do not necessarily postmodernism make. Moreover, many of Polan's claims too often depend on bold but unsupported and sometimes conflicting statements, and he frequently ignores the heritage out of which *The Sopranos* has evolved.

For example, Polan is on to something when he explores the show's frustration of conventional character development by depicting "a world of unchanged people stuck in a place and time when sameness is substituted for difference and where progress gives way to repetition" (64). This is an aspect of the characters that Chase, using a different vocabulary, has confirmed in private conversation with me. Polan supports his insights by looking to the concept of "late style," developed by both Edward Said and Theodor Adorno. But after invoking "late style" as an attribute of fictions that are "willfully stuck in place" (63), in the next chapter he writes: "Whatever else goes into our experience of *The Sopranos*, it is at the very least about following an ever-changing universe" (73). It may be that the two statements can be reconciled, but that needs to be demonstrated.

And there are the problems that arise because Polan has opted to consider *The Sopranos* primarily in a televisual context, without also reading it through the gangster film genre, even though Chase alludes to gangster movies in numerous scenes. For example, Polan proposes a resemblance between the construction of masculinity in soap opera and a feminized definition of the masculine in *The Sopranos* that "might have something to do with . . . redefinition and re-evaluation in a postfeminist age" (43), but says nothing about the historic feminization of gangster protagonists in film. There *are* interesting aspects to gender construction in *The Sopranos*—think of the feminized names of gangsters Pussy, Gigi, and the name "Sopranos" itself—but they and other gender ironies are continuous with traditions begun in *Little Caesar* (1931) and *Scarface* (1932), where we find hilarious allusions to the gangster protagonist's "feminine side." Moreover, Polan's speculations about postfeminism and television soap opera place him on shaky ground, since a substantial group of feminist critics contests the validity of the concept of postfeminism and since definitions of masculinity in soap opera took a leap backward into machismo in its crudest form, beginning in the early 1990s.

Something similar happens in his discussion of domesticity in *The Sopranos*. Polan ignores the abundance of family life represented in the gangster film genre in every period of its long history except during the Cold War years—and even then it made the odd memorable appearance: "Made it, Ma! Top of the world!" in *White Heat* (1949)—but extensively compares depictions of home in Chase's series with the way it is represented in sitcoms and in soap operas. He is on much firmer ground with this argument, which is interesting and well constructed, and many will support his strategy since it avoids the problems that present themselves when we compare television with film, but the tack Polan has taken opens a different can of worms. Chase has marbled the series with references to familial elements in gangster cinema that require serious consideration. Moreover, Polan is obligated by his own thesis to give some consideration to the potential conflicts between the concept of the postmodern and his own account of the vivid presence of domesticity in the series. Family life in North Jersey is highly conventional—except that daddy is literally a killer. Postmodernism, as it is understood by many, involves difference and destabilization of traditional cultural discourse. Perhaps Tony's twin roles as mafioso and paterfamilias are different and destabilizing enough for Polan to consider Chase's saga as postmodern. But perhaps Chase has drawn a searing modern portrait of American domestic hypocrisy. Chase certainly intends the latter, but his complex sense of life, as he has expressed it to me, as a "dream within

a dream," à la Edgar Allan Poe's poem, leaves an opening for the postmodern option. It would have been interesting to see how Polan would have dealt with this question.

"*The Sopranos* in the Marketplace," the second section of the book, is more successful. Polan's analysis of how the series spawned numerous *Sopranos*-themed goods and services, primarily tours of New Jersey sites and cookbooks, does say a lot about contemporary forms of commodification. Polan vividly describes a *Sopranos* bus tour he took, and gives us impressive statistics about the popularity of the tours and *Sopranos* merchandise. And he raises interesting questions about people who never watched *The Sopranos* yet take the tours and buy the cookbooks (and other *Sopranos* memorabilia).

On balance, though, Dana Polan has thought long, but not always productively, about *The Sopranos*. Yes, he effectively presents Chase's work as, in some ways, a victim of consumer culture. But does he also mislabel Chase's creation of vigorous, emotional modern storytelling as postmodernism instead of understanding it, more appropriately as many might say, as a successful contestation of the enormous pressures in televisionland to stick with reductive, factory-produced narrative structure? © 2011 Martha P. Nochimson

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TRICIA WELSCH

Whose Lives Are They Anyway? The Biopic as Contemporary Film Genre by Dennis Bingham

Dennis Bingham is on a mission, and he wants his readers to join him: "All of us who take the genre seriously should reappropriate that tangy word 'biopic' and unfurl it in the faces of all those who have treated the genre with the smugness they accuse the biopic of possessing" (13). Bingham objects both to the dismissal of biopics as dull or colorless and to their characterization as "entertaining lies" (11). This impressive, ambitious study of "the most maligned of all film genres" is a major contribution to the field, featuring detailed analyses of more than twenty films. Incredibly, the only other book on the subject is George Custen's classic *Bio/Pics* (Rutgers University Press, 1992).

Bingham argues that, though unrecognized, the form has undergone the developmental changes common to other genres. Thus the celebratory account of the visionary Great Man who overcomes obstacles to create something of lasting value—a painting, a vaccine—has led to films that showed him "warts and all" (151). In time, investigatory, postmodern, and parodic approaches challenged these norms, although all the modes remain available and in circulation. Bingham devotes considerable attention to the parodic mode, by which he means not mockery but an unexpected choice of subject: he calls these Biopics of Someone Undeserving. In such cases, filmmakers have free play in sympathetically shaping a life on screen, as when Tim Burton, for example, turns Ed Wood's "badness into enigmatic transcendence" (158).

Custen argued that during the studio era the biopic was a producer's form. In its post-classical versions, however, Bingham stresses the director's perspective. So the 1992 *Malcolm X* reflects Spike Lee's preoccupations, not James Baldwin's or Norman Jewison's—let alone the preferences of Warner Bros., the studio Lee famously denounced as "the Plantation" (173). Bingham argues compellingly that a filmmaker like Lee (whom he calls a "cinematic integrationist") can use the classical, celebratory biopic formula against its grain, to "mythologize [a] radical, revolutionary minority figure" (175, 169). Bingham similarly anatomizes Raoul Peck's *Lumumba* (2000), about the first elected Congolese prime minister (also the subject of a documentary by Patrice Leconte): "It confronts accepted or forgotten truth, replaces it with a revisionist truth, and in the process makes the historical biography the vehicle of a director's personal expression" (200). When handled by such directors, the biopic becomes a complex genre well-suited to the exploration of controversial political histories.

The second half of Bingham's book is devoted to the shortcomings of the female biopic, which is seldom either sympathetic or revisionist: "Madness, hysteria, sexual dependency, the male gaze, and a patriarchal authorship: that is the classic female biopic" (310). Its history has been so different from the male version that it requires a separate telling. "A long deep blackout" (260) of films about women's lives occurred as the studio system ended. A few late exceptions (*I Want to Live!* in 1958 and *Star!* in 1968) took a nonjudgmental approach to their subjects, eschewing standard female biopic narratives: "rise and fall," or "rise, fall, and rehabilitation," with "wallowing" the most powerfully performed action, as Bingham cleverly observes (219).

When the female biopic reappeared in the 1980s, it was "safe, timid, and compromised" (292), mostly interested in seeing its subject suffer. Michael Apted's *Gorillas in the Mist* (1988) offers a worst-case scenario: Dian Fossey, played by Sigourney Weaver, is "pushy, selfish, flaky, disorganized, naïve, abrasive, impatient, and oblivious to others" (304),

a dream," à la Edgar Allan Poe's poem, leaves an opening for the postmodern option. It would have been interesting to see how Polan would have dealt with this question.

"*The Sopranos* in the Marketplace," the second section of the book, is more successful. Polan's analysis of how the series spawned numerous *Sopranos*-themed goods and services, primarily tours of New Jersey sites and cookbooks, does say a lot about contemporary forms of commodification. Polan vividly describes a *Sopranos* bus tour he took, and gives us impressive statistics about the popularity of the tours and *Sopranos* merchandise. And he raises interesting questions about people who never watched *The Sopranos* yet take the tours and buy the cookbooks (and other *Sopranos* memorabilia).

On balance, though, Dana Polan has thought long, but not always productively, about *The Sopranos*. Yes, he effectively presents Chase's work as, in some ways, a victim of consumer culture. But does he also mislabel Chase's creation of vigorous, emotional modern storytelling as postmodernism instead of understanding it, more appropriately as many might say, as a successful contestation of the enormous pressures in televisionland to stick with reductive, factory-produced narrative structure? © 2011 Martha P. Nochimson

MARTHA P. NOCHIMSON is the author of *Dying to Belong: Gangster Movies in Hollywood and Hong Kong* (2007), for which she interviewed David Chase extensively.

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TRICIA WELSCH

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and then she dies. Bingham is very critical of any filmmaker who lacks sympathy for his subject; it is not the presentation of Fossey's negative traits to which Bingham objects, it is that Apted makes her into "a feminine stereotype: strange, irrational, and erratic" (298). Bingham thinks *Coal Miner's Daughter* (1980) a better biopic because Apted—a noted documentarian—met Loretta Lynn and observed her in her milieu. Again, the director's creative freedom must be complemented by his responsibility to his subject. (Yet thankfully Bingham does not worry about fidelity to the real life, a boogeyman for many writing about biopics.) Bingham's insistence on sympathy is less simplistic than determinedly humanistic. It is less about making nice than about moving away from melodrama.

Also working against the female biopic is "the tendency to see living, discovery, and realization as anticlimactic and undramatic" (326). Nothing much happens in the recent, revisionist biopics Bingham approves: *An Angel at My Table* (1990), with its modest quest narrative replacing the marriage plot; *The Notorious Bettie Page* (2005), whose subject's accomplishment is that she is "a person of integrity no matter what happens to her" (358); and *Marie Antoinette* (2006), "a bold oil-and-water amalgam of realism and fantasy" (365) which rejects melodrama to the point of skipping Marie's imprisonment and death. An exception is *Erin Brockovich* (2000), "a social problem biopic comedy" (334) in which legal institutions save the day after Erin does the legwork.

Bingham calls the Dylan biopic *I'm Not There* (2007) "the most obsessional of films" (402). It takes one to know one: Bingham's chapters are crammed full of detailed observations about the films in question and the lives they depict. There is an enormous amount here to ponder and enjoy. His erudition is impressive, though the details occasionally obscure the argument. This is a meticulously researched work: it explores alternate script versions and production histories; performance styles; roadshow presentations; documentaries reframed as biopics; fictional lives presented as biopics; historical footage and reenactments; the social problem drama; reception histories; international politics; published biographies; and cinematic echoes and influences across the genre. The fruit of many years' labor, *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?* offers an intelligent, provocative, and clearly partisan reading of the biopic that will draw its readers back to the films and lives it explores. © 2011 Tricia Welsch

TRICIA WELSCH is Chair of the Department of Film Studies at Bowdoin College.

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CATHERINE CLEPPER

The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience by Jennifer Barker

The cover of *The Tactile Eye* features a still from Andrei Tarkovsky's 1975 film *The Mirror*. It is an image of a woman reaching toward the mirror in front of her, as if to stroke her own reflection. Tarkovsky's lens focuses on the hand while allowing the woman's visage to diffuse slightly into the background. As Jennifer Barker notes in her book's introduction, this shot was achieved by placing the camera somewhere between the women's body and her hand. The unusual camera positioning, the point of view mediating between the woman's body and her mirror images, induces a feeling of in-betweenness in the viewer. According to Barker, the "reversibility" of this image "echoes the viewer's ambivalence of being drawn toward and pulled away from the film" (160). Likewise, the "contact" made between film and viewer in *The Mirror*'s cinematography suggests that, "we are both inside the film and outside it at the same time." This image, Barker argues, and the affective push-pull response it provokes in spectators, captures a moment of what can be called *tactile* vision.

The use of the word "tactile" in this context may at first seem paradoxical—physical contact isn't typically involved in film viewing—but Barker's debut monograph soon evinces its metaphorical virtues. Here, the idea of cinematic tactility stands in for a mode of perception defined by the reciprocity of filmic images and offscreen bodies. Thus Barker posits that the certain films have emotional "textures"—grains, weaves, and depths that viewers can "feel" and that allow us to be "touched" by the cinematic experience. Similar book projects—notably Laura Marks's *Touch* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002) and *The Skin of the Film* (Duke University Press,

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2000)—have preferred the idea of cinematic "haptics" or "hapticity" to that of the tactile, contending that the latter concept lacks psychological or semiotic gravitas. Barker, however, boldly and persuasively lobbies for a fuller understanding of tactility, questioning the terminological preferences of Marks and others. Tactility, she asserts, has always held the potential to describe more than what is within reach: "Touch need not be linked explicitly to a single organ such as the skin but is enacted and felt throughout the body . . . and within the tactile world" (2). Put to work by Barker, cinematic tactility encompasses a wide variety of "touch experiences" including visual surface play (looking as if touching), the kinesthetic effects of camera work (a mimetic awareness of cinematographic movements), and the visceral rhythms of film's deeper "organs" (relating our "gut" instincts to cinema's most vital properties, movement and time). *The Tactile Eye* undertakes a taxonomy of film's tactile world in terms of these strata, examining the links between onscreen images and the embodied reactions of spectators.

Barker's study moves progressively deeper into what she calls the "film's body," a concept borrowed from Vivian Sobchack's *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton University Press, 1991). Accordingly, the book's three main sections are entitled "Skin," "Musculature," and "Viscera." Of the three, "Skin" is the most thoroughly conceived and best displays the author's considerable gift for close analysis. In it, Barker argues that a film's painterly or textural qualities form an edge between spectators and the diegetic world, one that works simultaneously as both boundary and envelope: "a place of constant contact between the outside and the inside" (28). To that end, Barker analyzes *Repulsion* (1965), underscoring the griminess of Catherine Deneuve's apartment as the guise through which viewers understand the heroine's pathological disgust. Similarly, *Pather Panchali* (1955) and *Toy Story* (1995) both invoke textures of childhood (crinkled tin foil and banana leaves, rubbery plastic soldiers and finger paint), imparting a sense of curiosity and vulnerability to their respective surfaces. Barker thoughtfully observes, "If we feel *for* the children in these tales, it is in part because we feel *with* them, experiencing the same tactile fascination that they have towards their world" (44). At the end of "Skin," Barker argues for an increase in the level of attention paid to cinematic textures and finishing effects, demonstrating how they may reveal more about structures of sympathy than previously assumed.

The following chapters, "Musculature" and "Viscera," place *The Tactile Eye* in murkier territory, both theoretically and rhetorically. Barker defines "musculature" as the "body language" of film and places special emphasis on how film can inspire mimetic (or mirroring) gestures in its spectators. She points out that it is common to lean closer to the screen during a love scene or to relax back during a scenic long shot. She also notes how chase sequences, like those from *Bullitt* (1968) and *Wanted* (2008), are deliberately edited to induce excitement and physical nervousness. "Viscera" explores more intrinsic gut-level filmic rhythms—for example, twenty-four frames per second. As she does throughout *The Tactile Eye*, Barker invokes a double meaning of "visceral" (both "internal" and "intuitive") in order to root out similarities between celluloid and human substance. Just as we perceive our own bodily functions to be fluid rather than intermittent and obedient rather than rebellious, Barker argues, so we have come to accept the illusions of cinematic time and vision as seamless and natural. Films that disturb this perceived continuity, such as the mostly still *La Jetée* (1962) or the eerily disjointed *Street of Crocodiles* (1987), awaken a disturbing sense of the cinema's basic operations. Especially when movies seem clumsy, irrational, or fragile, Barker posits, "Cinema gives us an [uncanny] feel for our own deep rhythms, reminding us what we're made of" (129).

"Musculature" and "Viscera" take significant conceptual leaps, relying on ideas such as "sensual harmony" (143) and "apprehension" (107) to smooth out rough philosophical terrain. While more sympathetic readers may not mind these conceits, others may find these passages conjectural, even whimsical, particularly when, in "Viscera," Barker begins speculating on the formal symmetries between the persistence of vision and the human circulatory system. But whether or not the reader is convinced of Barker's more esoteric musings, *The Tactile Eye*'s descriptive power and analytic lucidity is undeniable. A welcome new voice in phenomenological film theory (joining the likes of Marks, Sobchack, Linda Williams, and Steven Shaviro), Barker's writing—like the image on her cover—creates a palpable impression. © 2010 Catherine Clepper

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IN THE NEXT ISSUE

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WITCHCRAFT

The Hollywood blacklist casts a long shadow, stretching at least as far forward as March 21, 1999, a date when you could have seen me assume an uncharacteristic posture. I was watching network TV with my eyes glued to the screen: the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science was awarding Elia Kazan a Lifetime Achievement award, and few recipients have been as controversial or publicized. Some present gave Kazan a standing ovation; others conspicuously sat on their hands. I wanted to see who in the audience did what. But I was prevented from finding out. ABC's coverage of this stage of the Awards was orchestrated around extreme long shots, facial close-ups, and rapid cutaways. Kazan during the Cold War had boosted his career by naming names, identifying who did what; network TV, a full half-century later, was using the visual means at its disposal to *avoid* identifying Kazan's remaining cheerleaders and detractors.

The Hollywood blacklist—on which Kazan set his seal—stretches further back (as well as further forward) than is often supposed. In 1939, back when a Nazi–Soviet pact appeared to be on the books, the House Un-American Activities Committee went to California for the first time to investigate alleged communist influence. In 1947 HUAC pounced again: suspected communists were summoned to Washington DC. The studio heads could either resist HUAC and refuse to collaborate with people whose interference they resented—in which case they would risk accusations of disloyalty and "anti-Americanism"; or they could aid and abet HUAC and collaborate in a witch hunt. Collaboration with HUAC was the path to law-abidingness and respectability. The Truman administration in Washington was purging itself at the time, and the moguls, not to be outdone, closed ranks, conceding the presence of communists in Hollywood, who could be duly identified and named by others (which is where the blacklist, and Kazan, came in). If there were problems in Hollywood with what was called "loyalty," the studios could take care of them. They fired anyone who defied a Congressional committee and/or refused to establish his or her noncommunist credentials. They also steadfastly denied the existence of "subversive" content in any Hollywood film.

Accordingly, the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals did HUAC's work for it. Not only did Kazan play his part and (in the parlance of the blacklist) "sing like a canary," he also proceeded to make *On the Waterfront*, in which "testifying," i.e. naming names, became the *only* honorable thing to do. He then went on to make *East of Eden*, *Baby Doll*, *A Face in the Crowd*, *Wild River*, and *Splendor in the Grass*. All of these, as J. Hoberman drily notes in *An Army of Phantoms*, "feature some form of betrayal" (187), as does *Viva Zapata!* too. Worse still, before naming names, Kazan had nailed the HUAC hearings for what they were: a "degradation ceremony" designed not to yield information—which the inquisitors already had to hand—but to abase "witnesses," making them squirm on camera. While U.S. POWs during the Korean War were urged to tar if not feather the "stool pigeons" in their ranks, HUAC was busily, obsessively rewarding collaboration on the home front.

An Army of Phantoms is a worthy addition to the literature on Hollywood and the cold war largely because of Hoberman's eye for this kind of absurd juxtaposition. We learn for instance that *Invaders from Mars* opened in New York three weeks before the execution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg; and that amid all the "thought control" to which (we were assured) POWs were relentlessly subjected by their automaton captors in Korea, John Ford's *The Searchers* asked whether "it is the brainwashed captive or the fanatical frontiersman who refuses white civilization" (320).

Hoberman cites André Bazin's observation that history, which "had previously been the Western's material, was now [with Ford's *Fort Apache*] its theme" (80). In Hoberman's words, by showing the Custer figure (Henry Fonda's Owen Thursday) as a martinet and then allowing John Wayne's heroic Kirby York to endorse the mythologization of his defeat, *Fort Apache* has it both ways—it is "at once a demystification and an argument in favor of rewriting history as patriotic propaganda" (81). Equivocation—ambiguity to some, hypocrisy to others—became a Hollywood staple. According to producer Walter Wanger, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* showed "how easy it is for people to be taken over and to lose their souls if they are not alert and determined . . . to be free" (306). Hoberman expounds the point: "Drifting down from the sky, seedpods from outer space replicate human beings. As they sleep, people are replaced with perfect, emotion-free, vegetable doubles—Earth successfully colonized by the robotic asexual other-directed drones of a harmoniously single-minded mass society" (306). *Invasion* "showed America alienated from itself: the 'good' motherland experienced as a nearly identical 'bad' one" (312). So, like *High Noon*,

Film Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 4, pps 82–83, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic, ISSN 1533-8630. © 2011 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2011.64.4.82

Invasion "lent itself to both right-wing and left-wing readings—either a drama of communist subversion or a parable of suburban conformity" (311–12).

An Army of Phantoms is a "prequel" to Hoberman's earlier book, *The Dream Life*, just as Robert J. Corber's *Cold War Femme* is a companion volume to his earlier *Homosexuality in Cold War America*. While Hoberman proffers a tour de force that ranges with brio and panache (but sadly without illustrations) all over the terrain of the Cold War, Corber's is a more finite and scholarly work that stretches this terrain even further. *Cold War Femme* consists in close, eye-opening rereadings of films (*All About Eve*, *The Children's Hour*, *Marnie*, *The Haunting*) and of female stars (Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, Doris Day). "Since Michael Paul Rogin identified this category of [Cold War] Hollywood film in 1987," says Corber, "cultural studies scholars have expanded it to include movies that do not deal directly with the Cold War but nevertheless underwrite or legitimate Cold War ideologies, especially those regulating the construction of gender and sexual identities" (29). But Rogin didn't claim to have "identified" the cold war movie—Victor Navasky's *Naming Names* and Nora Sayre's wonderfully titled *Running Time* had already done this—but to have identified "counter-subversion" as a theme running through both overtly political and many apparently nonpolitical films in the wake of the HUAC hearings. This is the crazy, hall-of-mirrors logic with which we are not done even (or especially) today. That Corber's *Cold War Femme* makes such limited use of Rogin's work, and that Hoberman makes no use of it at all, indicates a missed opportunity.

In Corber's words, "The construction of the lesbian as 'un-American,' as a secretive, duplicitous figure who, like the communist, threatened to subvert the nation, surfaced most fully in the antihomosexual witch hunts conducted by the federal government throughout the 1950s" (17). Mary Elizabeth Strunk's subject in *Wanted Women*, the "gun moll" in her various manifestations, is a different kind of female outlaw, one who craves celebrity. (Think of *Bonnie and Clyde*.) There is nothing surreptitious about Strunk's "hard-boiled dames," who are "witches" (201) threatening the FBI and the national security state for which it stands. Strunk passes over the Cold War. McCarthyism, HUAC, and the blacklists are outside her remit. Readers may think the Cold War reaches further than she allows; John Updike's Rabbit Angstrom saw no point in *being* an American without the Cold War, and all three of the books under review help us see why. Strunk's female outlaws nonetheless fail to include Ethel Rosenberg alongside Bonnie Parker, Ma Barker, Kathryn (Mrs "Machine Gun") Kelly, Patty Hearst, and Assata Shakur.

Hoberman highlights Corber's argument as well as Strunk's from an unexpected direction: "It was Ethel [Rosenberg] who most horrified the public. If Julius seemed a bland little commie nonentity, his wife—like Dorothy Comingore [an actress who was blacklisted] or Rosaura Revueltas [an actress who was deported]—was a witch. Although the president was squeamish about sending a woman to the stake, he felt that the circumstances were mitigated by what he perceived as Ethel's uncanny power: 'It is the woman who is the strong and recalcitrant character, the man who is the weak one,' Eisenhower wrote to his son. 'She has obviously been the leader in everything they did in the spy ring'" (231). Hoberman adds in a footnote that "as declassified files reveal, Ethel was at most a passive accomplice in her husband's espionage activities; her death sentence was intended as a lever to extract Julius's confession." When no such confession was forthcoming, the government did not back down; "credibility" was at stake—*its* credibility, not Ethel's—as was "national security" and the whole wearisome litany that endures even (or especially) unto the present day.

The "public burning"—to steal a phrase from Robert Coover—of the Rosenbergs helps explain why Corber's term "witch hunt" is the right one to use. Witch hunts always find what they are looking for, even if they have to invoke or conjure them out of thin air. As Louis Brandeis put it, "men feared witches and burnt women." Strunk, who ignores the Rosenbergs and other victims of other Cold War inquisitions, nevertheless turns up examples aplenty of other public burnings, thus leaving us with questions. To what extent was the media demonization of the woman outlaw as a "terrorist" instrumental in *constituting* the FBI and the national security apparatus as witchfinders general? To what extent did the media blanketing of Bonnie and Clyde and their ilk provoke and enable (as Strunk suggests on page 112) the FBI's criminalization of radical politics during the 1960s and beyond? To what extent were the props and struts of the national security state—which include (but are not exhausted by) the blacklists, hearings, and name-namings that pepper and punctuate Hoberman's account—fictive, ideological, and media-driven all along? And to what extent are these props and struts still fictive, ideological, and media-driven today?

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BOOK DATA J. Hoberman, *An Army of Phantoms: American Movies and the Making of the Cold War.* New York: New Press, 2011, $29.95 cloth. 432 pages.

Robert J. Corber, *Cold War Femme: Lesbianism, National Identity, and Hollywood Cinema.* Durham, NC Duke University Press, 2011. $84.95 cloth; $23.95 paper. 264 pages.

Mary Elizabeth Strunk, *Wanted Women: An American Obsession in the Reign of J. Edgar Hoover.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011. $29.95 cloth. 258 pages.